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WILMAY

AND OTHER STORIES OF WOMEN

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BY

BARRY PAIN

AUTHOR OF
"THE OCTAVE OF CLAUDIUS," "IN A CANADIAN CANOE."

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WILMAY

WILMAY.

CHAPTER I.

PHILIP AMORY was only twenty years old when he decided to leave England. He had no relations to consult, and his guardian never opposed him in anything, but his friends—of which in spite of his eccentricities he had many—were indignant. He was leaving Cambridge in the middle of his career there, and the career had promised to be very brilliant. He was going to Queensland, and Queensland is a long way off. I told him that if he went there he might just as well die, and on the whole I should prefer the death. What made it more irritating was that he never gave one solid reason for going to Queensland, or even for leaving

England at all. A man's friends can hardly allow him to make a fool of himself without providing themselves with some plausible explanation, and accordingly we said that there was a woman in the case. It was not a very satisfactory explanation, because, if there was a woman in the case, we certainly did not know who the woman was.

At first he wrote to me frequently. At the end of six months I got one long letter from him, of which the first half was all about horse-breaking, to which he seemed to have given much attention, while the remainder of the letter was occupied with a proposal for a new reading in a passage in one of the "Agamemnon" choruses. To this letter there was a postscript, "I have married." He did not say whom he had married, or give any other information. I wrote to inquire and to congratulate, and sent him silver candlesticks.

He never answered that letter or acknowledged the present. I had no further news of him until a little more than a year afterwards,

when I happened to see in a paper the announcement of the death of his wife. I wrote to express my sympathy, and he never answered that letter either. I made allowance for his erratic nature, but my patience was considerably tried. Years went by, and then one day I got a short note from him :—

"DEAR EDWARD,—You never told me what you thought of that reading in the 'Agamemnon' which I proposed to you. I wish you would. Do you happen to want to buy —or to know anybody who wants to buy— a quantity of precious opals? Try to answer this at once.—Yours ever,

"PHILIP AMORY."

To this I replied :—

"DEAR PHIL,—Since you first wrote on the 'Agamemnon,' I have forgotten my Greek, but without acquiring in its place any desire to buy opals, or any knowledge of any one with that desire. You have treated me abominably, and eccentricity does not excuse

you. Come back to England, and I will forgive you—but correspondence with you is hopeless.—"Yours ever,

"EDWARD DERRIMER."

One more year passed, and then one morning a letter was brought me with the post-mark of Ayshurst, a little Buckinghamshire village. It ran:—

"DEAR EDWARD,—You declined—rightly, I think—to correspond with me. My faults as a correspondent are due to several causes. I write letters which I afterwards forget to post. I do not send news of myself, because it is impossible for me to realise that people must be told things about me which I do not require to be told about myself. Also, I have been very busy. However, you said that if I returned to England you would forgive me, and I have returned. I am thirty-two years old, and I have done my roaming. I shall not leave England again.

"I have bought Sinden, and settled here

with Wilmay. You remember that I once told you at Cambridge that I knew of a little spot which I meant to buy one day. That was Sinden—an Elizabethan house and about forty acres of freehold. The garden is a dream. Wilmay and I want you to come down to-morrow and stay for any period not less than one lunar month. For the sake of old times come, and bring my absolution with you.—Yours ever,

"PHILIP AMORY."

"P.S.—Wilmay is the child. Now, that's a case in point. How was I to realise that you require to be told that, when I never require to be told it myself?"

I hesitated, but the appeal to old times decided me. I wrote him a long letter, abused him for all his little failings, and said that I would most certainly come on the morrow, and my train would arrive at seven in the evening.

* * * * *

As I stood on the platform, watching the

receding train that I had just missed, I suppose that I felt and spoke like an angry man, for the porter mildly suggested that it was not his fault, and that he did not make the trains.

"How long is it to the next? Half an hour?"

"Full an hour."

I thought of putting off my visit until the morrow rather than dislocate my host's dinner-hour. But my bag was packed, and it did not seem worth while to go back after I had once started. To fill in the time I strolled out into the street, found a telegraph office, and sent off ninepence-halfpennyworth of my best apologies to Philip. Then it occurred to me that I might buy a present for Wilmay. It was characteristic that even now Philip had never mentioned whether Wilmay was a boy or a girl, but at ten years old the sexes have much in common. I passed at shop where they sold French chocolates, and bought enough to account satisfactorily for my existence to Wilmay—boy or girl.

Children mostly like you to produce some such evidence that your life is not quite purposeless.

I found Philip waiting for me on the station platform at Sinden. It was twelve years since we had met, and our conversation at first was, while his servant was looking after my luggage, incoherent—a volley of mixed questions and answers. His dog-cart was waiting outside the station, but Sinden was within ten minutes' distance, and at my suggestion we walked. Philip was wonderfully little changed by twelve years, as far as personal appearance went. He had looked, perhaps, older than his years at twenty; at thirty-two he looked younger than he was. He was a handsome man—tall, dark, clean-shaven, with the build of an athlete. He occasionally made little gestures while he talked—a habit, by the way, which he had never had while we were at Cambridge.

"Well," I said, as we walked, "you don't look old enough to be the father of a child of ten."

"Yes," he said, "Wilmay is ten."

"And is Wilmay a boy or a girl?'

"A girl, of course. Upon my soul, you don't know the simplest things."

I made the obvious retort, and he tried further to explain his erratic and abominable conduct.

"I know I should have written more often and told you about myself. But then some of your letters absolutely demanded an answer, and that sort I never can answer, and I wasn't always interesting enough to write about. Oh! look here, you shall ask me anything you like at dinner. I will make up all arrears of information then. By the way, do you like children?"

"You remind me of a girl who once asked me if I liked poetry. There are children and children."

"Well, yes; Wilmay is the other kind."

A short avenue of limes brought us up to the front door. My luggage had already arrived, and had been taken up to my room. The man who unpacked it took out four

largish boxes of chocolate, and placed them with solemnity in a regular line on the table. You get a good deal of chocolate for a pound or so. I selected a box which was covered with purple satin, and had a heart in gold on the top.

"Do you know if Miss Wilmay has gone to bed?" I asked.

"I believe not, sir. I will inquire for you."

He brought back word that she had not yet gone to bed.

"Then would you have this box taken to her, from Mr. Derrimer, with his love?"

That was the introductory or ingratiating offering. I reserved two boxes with which to revivify my popularity from time to time, and one as a farewell offering. The man brought back a message that Miss Wilmay desired to thank me very much for the present and the message.

CHAPTER II.

PHILIP AMORY and I were alone at dinner. He talked delightfully, told stories by the dozen, described bush life and mining life, told me a heap of those little interesting things that travellers forget to put in their books, but told me nothing at all about himself. I thought, perhaps, that he was waiting until the servants had gone. But even then he told me very little, and I hardly liked to accept his invitation to question him. I knew that he had married, and that his wife had died a little more than a year afterwards, shortly after Wilmay's birth. It was quite possible that even after a lapse of ten years he might feel himself unable to speak of that time. However, he did refer to it once, as we sat smoking in the library.

"Why don't you get married?" he asked me.

"That is what Bertha is always saying to me."

Bertha was my worldly sister, Mrs. Enterland, at that time thoroughly enjoying her second year of widowhood. "I can only tell you what I always tell Bertha—that, so far, I have never had the opportunity."

"You have no resolve against it?"

"Those that resolve against it incontinently marry the housemaid and drop out. No, I've no resolve. But I am thirty-two, and I have escaped so far, and I hope—humbly and with bated breath I hope."

So far we had both spoken flippantly enough. But now he said, quite seriously, looking away from me, "You are quite right; never marry. A man who marries, in the way that young men marry, risks loss. It becomes his greatest sorrow to remember his greatest happiness. He wants to curse God and die, and perhaps there are reasons why he cannot die. Never marry, never love."

There was a long pause. I did not know what to say.

"While I am speaking of this," he resumed, "I want to say that you sent me two letters, for which I have never thanked you, old man. But I was grateful for those letters, and I should like——"

"It is not necessary. It's all right. I understand perfectly."

"Then we will not speak of this again. If a man means to go on, and I mean to go on for another thirty or forty years, and the insurance people seem to think there's a chance of it—if, I say, a man means to go on, he must, by the time he has passed thirty, have got some sort of control over his own thoughts. He must be able to say to himself, 'Such-and-such an episode is closed; you must not think of this; you must not remember that.'"

"Can any man control his own thoughts?"

It is a popular fallacy that he cannot. I do, and many men do. I believe that most men of my age with the average history—or a history ever so little worse than the average

—must either learn to do that, or must go mad. But enough—we will talk of other things."

Perhaps it was because I had not his facility for putting things out of my mind. Certainly, although we did talk of other things, for some time we spoke with some seriousness and constraint. Gradually we got back to the old manner.

"Do you remember," he said, "that I wrote to you about some opals? You took that solemnly—at the foot of the letter. It was only my way of conveying to you the news that I was dealing in opals. I had fifteen hundred pounds' worth of them lying on the big table at which I sat when I wrote to you. But I didn't mean that I wanted you to find me a market for them."

"When you write to a man who is in a bad temper, underline anything which is not to be taken seriously, and tell him you've done it. Then he may possibly understand you. However, you did well with your opals, if Sinden is the result."

"Not as well as I should have done. Opals do not fetch their real value yet—they will, but at present they don't. I tried other things, too, but we needn't go into the details of my money-grubbing. Not being a Crœsus like yourself, I had to grub, and did grub. It would have been too absurd for Wilmay not to have had anything she wanted. However, it's over now."

It is, perhaps, as well that I should explain that I was not a Crœsus. I had an annual income of £1100 a year, and no prospect that it would ever be increased. Indeed, as it was derived in part from the rent of agricultural land, it promised to grow less.

I asked him how long he had been at Sinden.

"I have been here," he answered, "one week to-day. I have only been in England a fortnight. I had an agent here watching for a chance to buy Sinden for me, and as soon as he cabled to me that he had got it I returned."

I was rather surprised. There was nothing

in the furniture or arrangements of the house which indicated so recent an occupation. There was nothing temporary or makeshift. I said as much, and he explained that he had been lucky in making people do things for him the way he wanted them done. He said that on the next day he and Wilmay would show me the place.

"Tell me about Wilmay," I said. "What is she like?"

He turned his head, smiled, and told me to see for myself.

I looked round. I had not heard a sound, but the library door opened and Wilmay stood there. After all these years I have but to close my eyes, and I can still see Wilmay as I saw her then—a white figure standing in the dark doorway.

She was in a long white nightgown. Her feet were bare, exquisitely shaped, looking as if they were made of rose-petals. Her hair, of the palest gold, hung down below her waist. Her deep blue child's eyes were fixed on her father and myself. In one hand she

carried the box of chocolates, the other hand was stretched out as she came forward. She had the face of an angel.

"Wilmay," said her father, "this is Edward —Mr. Edward Derrimer."

She shook hands with me without the least shyness.

"Your Uncle Edward," I said, "if I may have that honour, a sort of supernumerary, unofficial uncle."

"I would sooner call you just Edward, if I may. I don't like the word 'uncle,' or the word 'meals,' or 'ulcer,' oh, and there are some other words too! The sound of them is so bad."

"By all means call me Edward. And what am I to call you—Will?"

"Never!" she laughed. "Nobody calls me that. Always Wilmay."

She made herself comfortable in a low lounge chair, and opened the purple box.

"It's so hot to-night, and I couldn't sleep. So I thought I would come downstairs just as I was, and try to find you. I did send a

message, but I wanted to thank you myself for this lovely box and the chocolates. How did you know that I liked chocolates?"

"It was a wild guess of mine."

"It was quite right. See, I've eaten half a row already. If," she added, pensively, "I were to eat four more, I should be ill."

I looked for some proper and conventional display of paternal authority. None came. Her father sat and watched her and me with an amused smile. I therefore took it upon myself to suggest that the box should be closed until the morrow. I did not want to have the death of the child on my conscience.

"Oh no!" she said. "As four would perhaps make me ill, I shan't eat four. I shall eat three."

And she did. Then she said that her father had told her that I was a fine musician.

I suggested some slightly milder term as being more likely to come within a hundred miles of the truth. Philip would have called

any man a musician who was capable of playing a Beethoven sonata with any approach to correctness and feeling. It was generous of him, but misleading. But Wilmay was not to be denied. She said that she wanted me to make some music for her.

Philip rose, apparently taking it for granted that I should do what the child wanted.

"We must come into the next room, then," he said. "There's a piano there."

It was a good instrument.

"It was tuned yesterday," said Wilmay, "by a man who smelt of sherry and told me to trot along. 'Trot along' has a bad sound, too."

I sat down to the piano, and did not in the least know what to play. It occurred to me that nursery rhymes might possibly appeal, and I tried some of them. When I had finished Wilmay came up to the piano and said, "Do you know this?" She hummed a scrap of the Tannhauser March. She hummed in tune.

"Yes," I said.

"Would you please play it?"

"Well," I said, "on a piano you can't—but no matter, I'll do my best."

If she had asked me to give her some idea of a Mendelssohn organ sonata on a penny whistle, Philip would have expected me to comply without a murmur.

When I had finished she put both arms round my neck, kissed me impulsively, said "Good night," and ran out of the room.

"Well," said Philip, when she had gone.

"Yes," I said, "Wilmay is the other kind."

"By the way," I added, when we had gone back to the library and lit our cigars, "I am not a father, and I have no experience of children. At the same time, if I let things pass without comment, I may be made an accessory after the fact, or something equally unpleasant. Do you allow a child of ten to get out of bed and catch her death of cold by wandering about the house with only her nightgown on? Do you allow her to execute

that wandering barefooted, when she may tread on a tin-tack, get blood-poisoning, and die of it? Do you allow her to ruin her health by sitting up until long after eleven, or to shatter what seems at present a quite useful digestion by unrestricted and excessive indulgence in chocolates? Forgive these questions—but I have still some rudiments of a conscience."

Philip laughed and told me I was an old woman. The night was very warm, and she would not—and knew she would not—catch cold. The floor of the house was not—and she knew it was not—composed of inverted tin-tacks. Also Philip himself regarded it as foolish to stop in bed when you could not sleep. He pointed out that the "excessive indulgence" was not proved, and that it was I who had put the temptation in her way. "But after all," he said, "I never allow or forbid. In Wilmay's case it is not necessary, and in the case of almost all children it is nothing like so necessary as is supposed."

"What? You have theories of the

education of children as well as of horse-breaking."

"I have pretty much the same theory in both cases—the least possible interference with the ordinary development of nature. I have studied wild men and wild horses. I have found in both something valuable that the common method of education and civilisation kills."

"From what I've read of primitive people, I should say that generally they were chiefly remarkable for dirtiness, ignorance, and brutality."

"Well, if you yourself lived among the Esquimaux, or if you were at the mines in a time of bad drought, you would not wash. The struggle for life brings out as much brutality here as you'll find among the Apaches, but in different forms. But don't misunderstand me—I did not say no interference with nature at all. I said the least possible. In the case of the horse, the least possible means quite a good deal, though less than is generally supposed. In the case of

the child in general, the least possible interference means but little interference."

"But that question of ignorance—children are ignorant, and they don't want to learn. They have to be made to learn."

"I answer you in your own words—there are children and children. I'm not trying to push my point to an extreme. I have no illusions about it. There are many children—boys especially—who won't learn anything if they can help it. But it's our own fault because we begin by ordering them about and saying, 'Obey me and learn this,' when if we could show them that the particular knowledge was to their pleasure and advantage, Nature herself would urge them to acquire it."

"I know you've broken horses. Have you educated children? or is this merely your habit of theorising?"

"I have more or less educated Wilmay. She could ride long before she could read. She did not begin to learn to read until two years ago. I used to read Hans Anderson to her. One day it struck her that if she knew

how to read, she would be able to read Hans Anderson when I was not there. So she wanted to learn—and did learn with unusual rapidity. Six months ago she decided that she would learn to write."

"Do you do the actual teaching?"

"No. Wilmay's woman, Mrs. Blayd, does that. I don't teach—I only stop other people from teaching until the right time comes. There are no regular lesson-hours for Wilmay—she begins work when she likes and stops when she likes."

"In fact she does everything she likes—has never learned self-control, or methodical habits, or regard for the feeling of others, and has been absolutely spoiled by a father who sits up of nights inventing theories to cover his own laziness, weakness, and eccentricity."

He laughed cheerfully. "Wait and see," he said. "Wilmay's not faultless, but before you have been here a month you will own that my system is the right system—for her at any rate."

I never did make this humiliating confession

to him. When some weeks later he asked me for it, I contented myself with saying that Wilmay was apparently a child who could not be spoiled, even by a father with a mass of mad theories.

CHAPTER III.

We sat very late that night talking, and when we separated we mutually agreed that ten o'clock or thereabouts would be the right hour for breakfast. However, I woke at six, went to sleep, and woke again once every ten minutes until shortly after seven, and then rang my bell and got up. When I was dressed I went downstairs and out into the garden. I found Wilmay there, and she came up to look after me. She shook hands, and asked me if I wouldn't like to have breakfast at once.

"No, thanks," I said, "the excellent Carter has just asked me the same question. But I've had some tea, and I'd rather wait until your father comes down. Have you had breakfast?"

"Not yet; I thought I would have breakfast with you two this morning."

I said that would be charming.

She took me off to see the garden and the stables. On the way it occurred to her that it would be pleasant to have breakfast on the lawn.

"We do sometimes, when it's a good morning like this."

I thought the idea capital. She called up an under-gardener, and said with much dignity—

"Would you kindly go up to the house, and let Carter know that we should like breakfast on the lawn this morning?"

It was very quaint—I was amused. While she was showing me her own pony she suddenly asked if I considered that music was as difficult to learn as writing.

I said that it was more difficult, more heart-breaking. I ought really, in self-defence, to have put it much stronger than this. I had guessed what would happen. I had made her want to learn music, and she would learn it,

and—this was the horror of it—I was to give her her first lessons. I had always been in the habit of saying that I believed there must be a special reward hereafter for music-masters, because in this life they have to suffer more than other men.

It was at breakfast-time that the moment arrived when I felt that I had either to consider myself a brute or to offer to teach Wilmay the piano. I set my teeth, and made the offer. She thanked me, and said that it would be lovely, but that she must not bother me and take up my time. That, of course, finished it. By the end of breakfast I was imploring as a privilege to be allowed to teach Wilmay the piano, and Wilmay was sweetly and graciously consenting. I told Philip afterwards that I thought in common decency he ought to have protested, and said firmly that he would not allow any guest of his to be turned into a music-master in his house. He smiled and said that he could not see it.

"Very well, then," I answered, "I will have regular hours for those lessons, and keep

to them, and break up your go-as-you-please system."

At this he only smiled again. Wilmay and I decided upon regular hours, and sometimes we kept to them. I may, perhaps, have forgotten about them three or four times—not more. As I pointed out to Philip, it was better than not even attempting to be regular.

Wilmay was an excellent pupil. She learned very quickly, but then she worked of her own accord far harder than most children would have worked under compulsion. I do not pretend that these lessons were an unmixed joy to me. I doubt if elementary lessons on the piano to a child of ten are ever an unmixed joy to anybody. But I had expected that they would be very much worse. Wilmay really loved music. As a reason for my existence, music seemed to do even better than chocolates, though probably those four boxes helped to solve the problem.

I chaffed Philip occasionally about his system of educating a child by leaving out the education and allowing her to do as she

liked. But, speaking seriously, that system had answered admirably with Wilmay. It seemed to have given her a spirit, an independence, a readiness of initiative that one very rarely finds in children of that age. She knew what to do. And, I confess it, she was not spoiled. She seemed to have an innate sweetness, tenderness, and unselfishness of nature that was proof against spoiling. She gave orders to the servants just as Philip would have done, and the servants were apparently instructed to take her orders as his own, but I never heard her give a dictatorial or unreasonable order, or omit to thank a servant who had done anything for her. Her own woman, Mrs. Blayd, was devoted to her. Mrs. Blayd was a blend of nurse, governess, and lady's maid, and also rather gave one the impression that she was a lady herself. She was a middle-aged woman, very quiet and reserved. Philip told me that she had been with Wilmay ever since her birth.

* * * * *

During the next three years I saw Philip

and Wilmay fairly frequently. Sometimes I went down to Ayshurst. Once or twice my married sister, Mrs. Enterland, had Philip and Wilmay to stay with her at her house in Mayfair. Bertha is a worldly little woman, with few ideals, and those mostly wrong, but before she began to be worldly she had a kind heart, and there are still traces of it left. I had talked to her about Philip and Wilmay, and she was eager to know them. I put it off as long as I could, because Bertha is the very opposite of Philip, and I thought the meeting would be a failure. But Bertha insisted, and the meeting was not a failure. It was a toss-up whether Bertha would decide that Philip was "Colonial" or "very interesting." Philip was a good-looking man, and he dressed well when he was in London, and he saved her from being swindled over some carriage-horses, and he spent money extravagantly, and he had a history which he did not tell her or anybody else. These things taken together made him in her eyes very interesting. Of course, there never was any doubt at all

about Wilmay. She charmed everybody and never knew it.

It was when Wilmay was just fourteen that I had asked her and Philip to come and stop with me at a little cottage that I had on the river. There was no river at Ayshurst, and both of them were fond of boating. On the morning of the day when they should have arrived I received a telegram from Philip—

"Come to Sinden at once. Most urgent."

CHAPTER IV.

I STARTED for Ayshurst, of course, as soon as I received the telegram. Had Philip been an ordinary man, the telegram would have worried me a good deal. As it was, I was by no means sure that he intended me to take it seriously, and that he would not laugh at me on my arrival. Even if he meant me to come, it was quite possible that it was for some perfectly trivial object. In short, I knew that it might mean anything or nothing.

I had telegraphed back to say by what train I was coming. The dog-cart was waiting for me at Ayshurst, and one glance at the face of the man who drove it was enough to make me ask him what was wrong at Sinden. He told me that there had been a bad accident, that Philip had been terribly hurt, and that it was

very doubtful whether he would still be alive on my arrival. The man drove hard, and and there was no time to tell me the details before we were at the door of the house.

The door was opened at once, before I could knock or ring, not by Carter, but by an old gentleman with his cuffs turned back. He was self-possessed, but he spoke quickly.

"Mr. Derrimer?"

"Yes. You are the doctor?"

"I am Dr. Ingwold. You are just in time. He says that he cannot die until he has seen you."

"There is no hope?"

"None. There never has been. I have been here since the early morning, when it happened, but I can only make the pain rather less for him. You had better go in to him at once."

"Yes." I went towards the staircase. The doctor touched me on the shoulder.

"Not upstairs," he said. "He is in the study. It would have been cruelty to carry him any further than was necessary."

We went down a passage to the study. At the door the doctor said—

"There is a nurse there, but she will come and wait outside with me. He was conscious when I left him."

Within I heard a faint repeated groan.

I entered the room. A bed had been put there, and the nurse was just turning away from it with a glass in her hand. Little details in the room seemed as if they would be noticed by me even against my will. There was a black morocco hand-bag on the table, bearing the initials R.H.I. in gilt. I found myself puzzled, and then decided that it must belong to the doctor. There was a faint smell of some anæsthetic—I wondered what it was. I noticed a grotesque design in vermilion on an old brown leather screen—was surprised that everything was in order, and that the room was so little changed. All this passed through my mind in a second, as I stepped from the door to the bedside. The nurse came up to me and asked me to go quite close to the bed so that he need only

speak in a whisper. Then she slipped out of the room.

Philip lay on the bed. There was only a sheet over him. His torn and broken body could not bear the weight of heavy bed-clothes. A bandage over his forehead had a fantastic effect like a turban. There was death in his face, and death in his changed voice. He did not move, but his eyes turned to me.

"Thank you for having come, Edward. Everything else is settled. I waited only to see you. I wanted to asked you if you would be Wilmay's guardian?"

"Yes. You should have been sure of that."

"I was, but I wanted to ask it. And you'll do the best you can for her?"

"All that I can."

"That's good of you. She was here a little while ago, but I wouldn't let her stay—scenes like this aren't—we just said good-bye. You take charge of everything. All papers are in the safe in the library, and Mrs. Blayd will give you the keys." There was a long pause,

and then he said, "I'm so sorry that I cannot give you my hand."

I could not answer. I put one hand lightly on his shoulder, watching his face to be sure that it did not hurt him. He seemed to become drowsy, his eyes closed, and I do not think he knew any longer that I was in the room. His voice was much weaker; he spoke at intervals, but I did not always hear what he said. Once I caught the words "a long day," and afterwards "and then it becomes much more quiet." Sometimes I heard Wilmay's name. He may have thought that he was speaking to her. Then his lips moved no more, and in the stillness I only heard a watch ticking as if it had gone mad, seeming now to grow louder and now fainter, sometimes to stop for a second and then to hurry on again.

"Philip," I said.

He made no sign that he had heard me. I stepped softly to the door and opened it. The doctor, the nurse, and Mrs. Blayd were waiting outside. The doctor and nurse went into

the room now, and I waited with Mrs. Blayd. She was a hard-featured woman, a woman with an immobile face that gave no token of her feelings. I asked her how Wilmay was.

"She is lying down now, sir. She does not speak, and she seems worn out. The rest will do her good, I hope."

"I hope so."

The door opened, and the doctor came out, closing the door behind him. "It is all over," he said. His look of relief was undisguised. "Can you see me in the library in a few minutes, Mr. Derrimer?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said. "I will wait for you there." The doctor went back into the room, and I turned to Mrs. Blayd. "Shall I——" I began.

"I think," she said, "that it would be better if I told Wilmay. And—there are other little things to be done—some orders—I could see after all that for you."

I thanked her.

"And would you tell Wilmay that I will come up and see her, if she would like it?"

"Yes, sir, I will tell her. But I do not think she would wish to see anybody at all just now. Shall I press her to——"

"No, no. It must be just as she likes. But you will let her know that I am here."

I went into the library, thought for a moment, and then wrote a note to my married sister, telling her what had happened, and asking her to come on the morrow. I rang, and had the letter sent off to the post. It was a warm summer day, but I had turned strangely cold. I sat and shivered, waiting for the doctor. It was an hour before he came—it seemed to me to be much longer.

He apologised for having kept me waiting. He had been detained.

"A fool of a housemaid had violent hysterics and another of the maids followed the lead. However, they're all right now, and professionally there is nothing more for me to do. But I should like to stop here to-night, because I think I can be of assistance to you. I knew Amory well—very well, considering that I knew him only during the last three years.

If I can do anything to carry out his wishes now, I am glad to have the opportunity. He asked me to stop with you, and he gave me some directions. Will you have me?"

"It is very kind of you," I said. "Frankly I do not even know what has to be done on such occasions. I shall be glad both of your advice and companionship. But will it not be taking up too much of your time?"

"Not at all. My assistant can very well look after my regular practice; this is quite a small village, and there is not very much to do. I leave most of it to my assistant generally. Then that is settled."

He rang the bell. "Carter, I shall be stopping here to-night. Could you send a message across to my house to tell my man to pack my things and bring them here?"

And then he turned to me. "And what have you done so far?"

"Hardly anything. I have written to my married sister, Mrs. Enterland."

"Yes. Amory spoke of her to me sometimes."

"I think she will come here to-morrow. She is very fond of Wilmay, and I fancy that Wilmay would be quite willing to go away with her."

"That, I think, is quite right. Indeed I shall think it quite right if you take her away altogether. She is an impressionable child, and should be away from the scene—from anything that reminds her. But we shall all miss her here."

"Do you know how she is?"

"I have just asked Mrs. Blayd. She says that she is not ill, but keeps to her room—will not see any one."

He mentioned to me some papers in the library safe, of which Mrs. Blayd has the keys.

"I should, perhaps, look over them to see if there is anything which needs immediate attention."

"Yes, that should be done to-night. Amory often told me that he wished to be cremated, and with as little fuss as possible, but there may be further directions."

A servant brought in a message that Mrs.

Blayd would be much obliged if I could speak to her for a minute.

"Very well," I said; "I will see Mrs. Blayd in the dining-room."

She handed me the keys, hesitated, and then said—

"It was about Wilmay, sir, that I wanted to speak."

"Well?"

"She is not in the house, and I do not know where she has gone."

CHAPTER V.

"I DON'T understand," I said. "Do you know why she has gone?"

"The same thing happened once before, sir, about two years ago. She was very angry with herself for something, and she went away like this. She was away then for eight hours."

"Eight hours? Was she not found and brought back before that?"

"Mr. Amory would not permit any one to go and look for her. He told me she was free to go in and out as she liked, and that she was able to take care of herself. He said, too, that if inquiries were made about her, she would become the subject of a good deal of silly talk in the village, and neither he nor Wilmay would like that. She went in the

morning, and it was after dinner when she returned. No one but Mr. Amory and myself knew of it, and neither of us said anything to her about it."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Blayd," I said; "but the case is different now. The poor child is half mad with grief. What you have told me makes me very anxious. And it is already getting late. I think a search should be made for her, with all possible discretion, of course, and without creating talk. But still it seems to me that something must be done."

"Very well, sir," said Mrs. Blayd, but she said it doubtfully.

"Well," I said, "you have known Wilmay from her birth. What do you think yourself —what do you really think?"

"I think that if we found her now it would be of no good. She is not herself. If we let her have her way, she will stop out to-night, but she will come back to-morrow morning. She does not forget those who are fond of her. She would come back if it were only

for your sake, sir, or my own, I feel sure of it."

It seemed to me to be rather a difficult position. If I did not go to find Wilmay and bring her back, I was not taking proper care of her; and if I did, I was acting contrary to the wishes of her dead father.

"Wait," I said to Mrs. Blayd. "I shall ask Dr. Ingwold what he thinks would be best."

The doctor was of the same opinion as Mrs. Blayd. "It may do her some slight temporary harm to stop out all night, but—well, I know her, and I think it more likely to do her good." So we settled that, at any rate, until to-morrow morning nothing should be done.

From Dr. Ingwold, later in the same evening, I heard some details of the accident.

"It is the old story," said the doctor. "Your nervous, timid whip, who does not really understand horses, never comes to any harm. He takes no risks. It is the men who really can drive, who really can do a good

deal with a horse, that always try to do just a little more, and have the accidents. In the early morning Philip had driven out with a horse that had already been a good deal of trouble to him. But it was a valuable animal, and he was anxious to finish its education. He took no one with him, and he said to the groom who brought the horse round that he should drive to the station, as he had some inquiries to make there. The groom noticed that, because he knew the horse would not stand sight or sound of a railway train, and knew that Philip was well aware of it too. It was three miles away from the railway station that Philip was afterwards found; there was a steep embankment there at one side of the road, with a white painted wood fence by way of protection. Cart, horse, and man were found at the bottom of this embankment, and the fence, which seems to have been rotten, was all broken down. Philip did not explain exactly how it happened, he said only that he thought it had been mostly his own fault."

Dr. Ingwold was of great assistance to me, and took on himself the trouble of all the horrible business connected with death. As it grew later, and Wilmay did not return, I again became very anxious about her. I was afraid that she might come back and find the house shut up and everybody asleep. I arranged, in consequence, that I would sit up that night in the library. The library windows opened on to the upper terrace of the garden. I drew the shutters back from these windows, and had the lamp placed near them, so that at whatever hour Wilmay returned she might be able to see that I was still up. The doctor went to bed, but said that he would be down very early in the morning to take my place, and give me a chance of an hour or two's sleep.

I had found in the safe several papers addressed to me. I put them on the table by the lamp, drew up my chair, lit my pipe, and began to open and read them. There was a terrible quiet in the house, almost as if the inanimate house knew that a dead man was

lying there. So much did this idea impress me that the rustling of the papers, or the noise made by the shifting of my chair, seemed to be like a profanity. One gets into a nervous imaginative state when one is emotionally worn out and then sits up late at night.

All the time that I was reading I was also listening intently. If the branches outside moved in the light wind, the sound seemed changed to Wilmay's voice, and I looked up from the papers. At any moment I was ready to hear her step on the gravel outside, to open the window, and call to her. But she never came. The long hours wore on, tediously long, until the dawn came, and outside in the garden the whispered chirpings of the birds broke into full song in the sunlight.

Amongst the papers there was a copy of his will, the will itself being in the charge of his solicitors. I knew that he had arranged for his solicitors to act as his executors, because we had often referred to this. "I may," he used to say, "have bored people during my

lifetime. I will go further, and say that when I have got on to any of my hobbies, such as precious stones, or emendations in the 'Agamemnon,' or horse-breaking"—and this by no means exhausted the list of his special subjects—"I must have bored people. In fact, I've seen them get restless, and smile, and try to look intelligent, and have known that I was boring them and yet been unable to stop it. But I don't mean to go on boring posthumously. I don't mean to ask a man of leisure to do badly for nothing what a man of business can be paid to do well." I did not even glance over the will that night. I am not precisely a sentimentalist, but I was in no hurry to find out what money the dead man had, or what he had done with it.

There was a long letter, addressed to me, and dated only a couple of months before. It began by referring to the uncertainty of life, "even for a man living as quietly, carefully, and unexcitingly as myself." It went on with his request that I would be Wilmay's

guardian, and here, when I would have welcomed the most minute and elaborate directions, he gave none, or next to none. There were only a few suggestions. One, which had already occurred to me, was that Wilmay should go to live with my sister, Mrs. Enterland. He also suggested that, though it might become necessary now to put restrictions on her in some ways, she should still be allowed to work out her own education just as she liked. In concluding, he gave me a little—a very little—information. His wife's maiden name had been Wilmay Forland; she had died very soon after her daughter's birth. "She was the best woman in the world," he wrote, simply, "and, I think, one of the most beautiful. I had no opportunity to get her portrait painted, and we both disliked photographs. That has not mattered, for I have always remembered her, and, as the younger Wilmay grows up, I think you will be able to see what her mother was like." He went on to say that after his death he believed that Wilmay would have no other

relation living, though there might possibly be one—her mother's brother. "This man's name was Charles Forland. Before I arrived on the scene I am afraid he was in far from comfortable circumstances. He had already spent his own small capital and the greater part of his sister's. He was still getting money from her, from time to time, in order that he might in future, as he phrased it, 'adopt a quite different course.' But these sums were of necessity small, and apparently, after paying for his bare livelihood and the few little luxuries that he felt he could fancy, they left no margin for the adoption of the quite different course. In addition to this, his sister had entirely ceased to believe in him or respect him. His conduct was not, it is true, of a kind to make one think that he respected himself, but it was always quite obvious that he liked others to respect him, and would do anything to secure that respect except deserve it. When I appeared on the scene, I was fortunately able to change his circumstances. I wrote

him cheques. As I became richer, I wrote him larger cheques. I cannot claim that I have ever been able to write him cheques so large as to make him feel justified in the adoption of the quite different course. But I have enabled him to live in comparative affluence without working for it. The only thing that he was required to do for it was to abstain from seeing my wife or daughter, and to see me only on pay-day, when he called for his cheque. I do not say that I respected him or believed in him, as he would have liked. But I paid him to keep away, which he seemed to like still better. The last time I saw him was at Sinden, rather more than three years ago. He had called to suggest that he had been put to great personal inconvenience and expense by my move to England, and that the price of his passage both ways should be added to the customary amount of his cheque. It struck me at the time that he gave every promise that he would die of drink in the course of the year. But I did not like to

be too sanguine about it; Charles Forland rarely stuck to any one thing for long. Since then I have not seen him, and I am quite sure he is dead. If he had been alive, he would have been to me for money, and the absence of any demands from him is equivalent to his certificate of death. It was, I confess, always amazing to me that he and Wilmay were brother and sister, children of the same parents. But such things happen. He has never seen my daughter Wilmay since she was a baby, by the way, and Wilmay neither recollects him nor knows of his existence. She had better not be told about him. Should he turn up again—but he will not. As I say, I have the equivalent of his death certificate. But do not let me imply that Charles Forland had no good points. He blackmailed me for having married his sister, and he would do no kind of work, and later in life he seems to have become excessively intemperate. But he was a handsome man, a good talker, and occasionally a wit—a man by no means without charm."

I read the whole of that letter with great interest twice over. I glanced through some of the other papers. At five o'clock I heard footsteps overhead, and then Dr. Ingwold came down and entered the library to take my place, sending me up to bed at once.

CHAPTER VI.

I HAD not expected to sleep, but I fell asleep at once. I suppose I was about tired out. For rather over two hours I slept soundly, and then woke suddenly, with a start, with the idea that I had just heard Wilmay call me loudly by my name. It was, of course, a delusion—I had been dreaming. But though I recognised that, I was unable to go to sleep again, and rose.

I joined the doctor at breakfast. Wilmay had not returned. For the first time the doctor looked a little hesitating, a little less as if he knew exactly the right thing to do, and was perfectly able to do it. We sent for Mrs. Blayd, and had a long talk with her. She told us of two or three places near, where Wilmay had always been fond of going,

and where she might possibly be found now. I decided that we would try those places first, and that then if we did not find her, there was no help for it, and a regular search would have to be instituted with all the assistance that we could get. To this Mrs. Blayd quite agreed; like the doctor, she was beginning to get nervous. The poor woman had, it appeared, herself been up most of the night, and looked worn and ill.

The morning was glorious—a cool wind, a brilliant sun, and the country as beautiful as if no one had ever died or been unhappy. The doctor and I decided to go first to a plantation standing on the ridge of a low hill about a mile away from Sinden. He went up the plantation on one side of this ridge, and I on the other. We were out of sight of each other, but within call. One's footsteps were absolutely noiseless on the soft white sand of the narrow winding path. At the first turn in this path my search was over. Wilmay was coming down the path towards me. She carried a great bunch of wild roses

tied together with the riband that she had taken from her hair. The dust had powdered thick on her little tan shoes; her pretty hands had been a little torn and scratched by the brambles. Her face was white, and her lips almost colourless. She smiled when she saw me, and called me by my name.

"Wilmay," I said, "poor little Wilmay! I am glad I have found you."

"I was coming back," she said.

"You very nearly frightened us."

"Yes, I have been thinking about that. I would not have been away so long only I wanted to get quite quiet again. That is why I came here, where there isn't anybody. I will be good now."

"It's all right, dear; I didn't mean to find fault with you. It's all right now that we have got you back again. Aren't you very tired?"

"Not very. I slept for a little time, until the sun on my eyes woke me. Then I got these." She held out the roses.

"They are lovely," I said.

She put them in my hand. "I want you

to give them to my father with my dearest love. I shall not see him any more, not any more now." Her voice was wistful and sad, but quite steady. I think she had made up her mind not to cry any more—that she thought it might distress us to see her crying.

We walked a few steps further, and I was just going to tell her that I had the doctor with me, when she said—

"I've suddenly got tired, Edward. Will you—help me a little?"

I caught her in my arms as she fainted, and put her down on the grass by the path. In a minute I had the doctor by her side. He had come prepared for this emergency, and he soon revived her. When her eyes opened again, she seemed surprised to see him.

"I thought it was Edward," she said.

"It was—I am here too."

"I'm so sorry—but I can walk again now."

We would not let her walk, and I carried her the rest of the way.

* * * * *

Before mid-day Bertha arrived, and I was

never more glad to see her. She had given up a host of social engagements, and was prepared to give up any number more for Wilmay's sake. It was the greatest sacrifice that could have been demanded of her, and she made it most willingly. She heard from me, and heard with composure, of Philip's death, but she could not bear to hear how Wilmay had gone away to the plantation "where there isn't anybody," and how I had found her. She stopped me, and said that a crying woman would be of no good in the house, and she would hear the rest some other time. She spent most of her time that day with Wilmay, and two days afterwards gave up the rest of the London season and took Wilmay away to the sea. Wilmay was quite willing to go; she had grown very fond of Bertha.

They spent the whole of that winter abroad together, and I was with them some part of the time. Youth is recuperative; one blow may take its strength and spirit and gladness for a time, but youth will have them all back.

Wilmay became the old Wilmay again, saw life with her blue eyes as bright as before, rode her pony, learned to swim and to fence, and chattered the prettiest French without ever learning it at all.

"She is at the awkward age," said Bertha some time afterwards to me, "but with the awkwardness left out. In a few years' time I shall have to begin to think——" Bertha paused. "A beauty, four thousand a year, and the sweetest nature in the world. She ought to do very well."

"There's a splendid auctioneer lost in you," I said.

Bertha said that was merely rude.

"Well," I said, "at any rate wait until the time comes."

"Of course I never breathe a word to her about it—my lord the guardian."

"I should think not. And when the time comes, remember that Wilmay has not an atom of worldliness in her nature."

"Nor have I," retorted Bertha, "only a little common sense."

"You can call it what you like, but I won't have her—when the time does come—forced into anything, however brilliant."

"You don't understand these things," said my sister, with a sigh of resignation; "but as the child's not yet sixteen, you needn't begin to trouble your guardianish mind just yet."

On Wilmay's sixteenth birthday, she, Bertha, and myself dined together at Bertha's house. There was no one else there. We had dined together in that way many a time before, but this evening—this evening for the first time—it was different.

CHAPTER VII.

"MRS. ENTERLAND desired me to say, sir, that she would be down directly," said Carter, as he opened the drawing-room door.

Carter and Mrs. Blayd had both been taken into my sister's service—Carter, of course, as butler, and Mrs. Blayd as maid to Wilmay, and housekeeper, occasional secretary, and several other things to my sister. She had no fixed position, and my sister said that she was a treasure.

I waited a few minutes in the drawing-room. It was the usual fashionable mixture of things ancient and modern, and just as much too full and too feminine as every other drawing-room in the district. Then Bertha entered looking mysterious and pleased, which she was, and much younger than thirty-five, which she was

not. She shook me warmly by the hand, kissed me, and exclaimed, "Edward, we've got a surprise for you."

"Yes?" I said. "Then, of course, you needn't trouble to apologise."

"Why, I've hardly kept you waiting a second. The fact is that it didn't come until the last moment—oh, I've nearly let the secret out."

"Let it quite out. You won't be happy until you've done it. Besides, I hate surprises. They're all alike—something goes pop and hurts you, and then everybody else laughs. I think they're shockingly vulgar myself."

"But this surprise isn't at all like that. It's beautiful."

"Well, how's Wilmay? And where's Wilmay?"

"Wilmay's very well indeed, and quite charmed with your present, and you won't see her just yet—that's part of the secret."

"You've hidden her behind a curtain or a screen or somewhere. And she'll jump out and scream, and the ghastly part of it is that

you'll both of you think it funny. When is it going to happen?"

Carter announced that dinner was served.

"It's not going to happen at all, and Wilmay's much too old to care about such stupid childish games. Take me into the dining-room, and you shall behold her."

In the dining-room Wilmay was standing at one end of the table. She was a transformed Wilmay. Hitherto she had worn her hair down; now her hair was up and done in the latest and correctest fashion. Hitherto, on the occasions when she had dined downstairs with Bertha and myself, she had worn something which I called a "kid's compromise," but I believe is known as a demi-toilette. Now she was in a regular dinner-dress, white, low, and long. Round her neck was the string of pearls that I had given her. She looked very shy and rather pleased; she smiled and blushed. I made a low obeisance, kissed her hand, and begged to be allowed the honour of congratulating Miss Amory on her birthday.

Wilmay was protesting, and thanking me

for the pearls as we sat down to dinner. Wilmay, as my sister had arranged, took the place of the hostess, and Bertha and myself sat on either side of her.

"Well?" said Bertha, "and what might my lord the guardian happen to be thinking of us?"

"At the first shock—I mean, at the first enchantment—I can think only of myself. Wilmay, tell the truth. How old are you?"

"I'm sixteen, please, Edward. No, that's not right, I'm in my seventeenth year."

"And I'm really in my thirty-ninth year, and I'm considered to be young for my age; have always felt young until now. Now I feel that I am one hundred and four. I see the babe for which I bought chocolates——"

"But, Edward," interrupted Wilmay, "I was not a babe; I was ten years old."

"A very young ten, and wore on the occasion when I first met you a somewhat unconventional costume."

Wilmay laughed and blushed. It was as

though some one had given her the power of blushing for a birthday present. She had never been in the least self-conscious before.

"And now," I said, "what a change is here!"

"Not really changed," Wilmay pleaded. "My hair's done differently, and I've got a new dress, but I'm still just the same—the same, but in disguise."

But she was not just the same—and she was never just the same again. The twilight of childhood was passing, and the dawn was coming—the dawn, and the day, and the night.

The dinner was amusing enough. Bertha was always, more or less, a bright woman. Wilmay laughed more quietly, it seemed to me, than usual, and talked less. Some of the things she said were serious to the verge of sentimentality, and, of course, we laughed at her for them mercilessly. She had been reading stories and seeing plays, and she said that it seemed as if life were very sad, but

that the sadness was in some ways rather nice. And then she was compelled to laugh at herself.

Bertha said that I was not to be long over my cigarette, because I was going to play to them.

"No, I think not," I said. "Your piano's never in tune; and you cover it with a sort of brocade tablecloth, pot palms, photographs, majolica, and mess generally, because you think it looks pretty."

"Speak to him, Wilmay!" said Bertha. "Explain to him!"

"The piano's perfectly all right, Edward," said Wilmay, laughing, "and you may have the things taken off it, if you like. But while you're in my house you're expected—to—to behave as such."

"I accept the rebuke in the spirit in which it is offered, and in five minutes I will do myself the honour to wait upon her—as my tailor says."

But when I got into the drawing-room, somehow or other we all three began to talk,

and we went on talking until I rose to go. I had promised to meet some men at the club. Then Wilmay said that I must stop a little longer, and play, because it was her birthday. So I stopped and played them Chopin waltzes and nocturnes, and they went through the usual raptures. It was late rather when at last I stood in the hall putting on my coat. Wilmay followed me from the drawing-room into the hall.

"Has Mr. Derrimer's cab got a lamp inside it?" she asked Carter. Carter believed so. "Then," she said, giving me a little note, "you may have this to read as you go home. Good night, again."

The note ran as follows :—

"DEAR EDWARD,—I am writing this in my bedroom before dinner. I know I shan't be able to thank you half enough for those lovely pearls, and I want to thank you again and again. You are always so kind to me.—Ever your loving

"WILMAY."

I put the note in my pocket. For a few minutes I mused absent-mindedly, and then I noticed that the cab had nearly reached the club. I made the man turn round and drive me home instead.

CHAPTER VIII.

BERTHA did not bring Wilmay out, definitely and formally, until she was seventeen. During the year before I had got into the habit of going rather often to Bertha's house. Bertha loved good music for ten minutes. It was essential that the music should be good and that it should not last longer than ten minutes. So she used to send me with Wilmay to St. James's Hall, while she enjoyed at home what she called "the rare luxury of not hearing a concert." Sometimes I rode in the Park with Wilmay. In one way and another I saw a good deal of her.

Bertha was widening the scope of her ambition for Wilmay.

"You may not know it," she said to me

"but Wilmay is probably at this moment the most beautiful girl in the world."

"I don't know all the others," I said. "But Wilmay looks all right."

"Looks all right! I've been through ten London seasons without seeing anything like her."

"Ten London seasons, or even more—we're getting very old, Bertha, very, very old."

"You can be old, if you like," replied Bertha. "Age is no crime in a man. But I'm not old, and I won't be. Ah," she sighed, "if I could only be Wilmay for one season! I wonder if she knows what a perfectly heavenly time she is going to have."

Bertha had some grounds for her extravagant praise. Wilmay's beauty was unusual and remarkable. In the street, as she went unconsciously past, people turned to look at her. In the theatre or at concerts, though she dressed quietly and her own attention was always wholly given to the play or the music, she made something like a sensation. That eccentric but charming old lady, Lady

Harston, met Wilmay by chance at Bertha's house, and was much impressed. When she left she shook Wilmay warmly by the hand, and said, "Good-bye, my dear, and thank you."

"But why do you thank me?" Wilmay asked.

"Because I have seen the face of an angel."

Wilmay asked me afterwards what she had meant. I told her that I did not know, and that Lady Harston was more or less mad. But I might just as well have told her the truth, for it was impossible to spoil her. I think she knew that she was very beautiful, and I suppose she was glad of it. But compliments on her beauty, however delicate and indirect, bored her when they came from women and frightened or displeased her when they came from men.

Bertha gave a dance soon after Wilmay came out. Certainly, that night Wilmay hardly looked like a flesh-and-blood mortal, an ordinary thing that danced and could be taken

down to supper. Her beauty was not of this world. It was not only that her features were perfect in shape, and that the colouring of her eyes and hair and skin was so lovely; she had a rare sweetness of expression, an expression that is only found with an absolutely unselfish and noble nature. I saw Stenling, the portrait-painter, looking at her with undisguised and reverent admiration. Later in the evening Bertha touched me on the arm.

"Isn't she splendid?" she said.

"Who?"

"Wilmay, of course," Bertha went on, speaking rapidly in a low voice. "Everybody's talking of her. Stenling's in a great state of excitement. He goes about saying, 'Either I paint Miss Amory or I die.' But I mustn't wait here"—and before I could reply she passed on.

Wilmay gave me two dances. I danced the first with her, and we sat out the second.

"It's good of you, Wilmay," I said, "to take pity on the aged and infirm like this."

"Do you know, Edward," she said, "that

you've always been the same age ever since I've known you. You've not changed in the least. You'll never be old."

"It's my fixed intention to be forty next year."

"But you've not changed, and I have. And women get old so quickly—it's very sad. Yes, of course I am young enough now. But"—she stretched out her hands—"I feel the nasty little slippery moments running through my fingers and laughing, and I can't hold them."

"Wilmay," I said, "this will not do at all. Your time is now. The night is yours —a night of triumph. You must be very happy."

She smiled. "I am not really very miserable. But I'm not very happy either."

"Why not?"

"I'm—I don't know—restless. Did you ever want something and yet not know what it was?"

I reflected, and said that I knew what she meant.

There was a moment's pause, and then she said—

"You must not tell Bertha that I am not quite absolutely happy, because she would not understand as you do, and it would distress her. I should not like that; I'd do anything for Bertha, you know, and anything wouldn't be half enough."

Yes, that was precisely what I was afraid of—that Wilmay would do anything for Bertha, even to the imperilling of her own happiness.

"Besides," Wilmay went on, "it is really nothing—a fit of sentimentality. Why don't you laugh at me, Edward?"

"To-night," I said, "you are too beautiful to be laughed at?"

She looked at me with wide-open, troubled eyes.

"Or else," I said, "perhaps I've grown too sentimental myself to do any laughing."

I left the dance early, and went home. But it was long after that before I went to bed. I had to make up my mind one way

or the other, and I found it difficult. The decision came at last, and it only remained for me to act upon it, and as far as possible to avoid the weakness of pitying myself. When my man called me in the morning, he was a little surprised to be told that we should leave for Paris that night.

In the afternoon I went round to Bertha's house. Wilmay was out. Lady Harston was taking her to some picture-gallery. "Which," as Bertha remarked, "is all very well when you're very young. But, personally, I don't go to picture-galleries the afternoon after a dance."

Bertha looked at me up and down. "What's the matter with you? What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing. Never been fitter."

"Well, you don't look it. Go home, and then go to bed."

"No," I said, "I shall go home, and then go to Paris."

Bertha got up, walked to the window, and looked out.

"Going to be away long?"

"Oh, some little time, I believe.

Bertha sighed. "You won't think me unsisterly, but I'm not altogether sorry to hear it."

"Unsisterly? Why, only a near blood relation could have said that. And why are you glad?"

"I think you know."

"And I'm positive I don't."

She crossed the room, and sat down again.

"It's not on my account, of course," she said. "I shall miss you very much. You've been most useful and obliging whenever I've given a dinner or anything, and I'm not ungrateful. I like nothing better than to have you here. I'm sure Wilmay will miss you too. But—well——"

"Ah! We come to it at last."

"Well, don't you think that you've been too much with Wilmay of late? You go everywhere with her. It might look—can't you see for yourself?"

"It might look as if I were her guardian. I am."

"And it may look something quite different. It may make people think that you yourself are engaged to her, or about to be engaged to her—prevent a suitable man from coming forward—do Wilmay a lot of harm, while it can do you no good. Where is the sense of it? Wilmay is fond of you very much as a child is fond of her father. What your feelings towards her are, I don't pretend to know. But if you carry on anything approaching a flirtation with her, you behave very meanly and badly, and of course you cannot possibly marry her."

"You put ideas into one's head. Let me think it over. By what law of this land or any other land am I forbidden to marry Wilmay, if we both decide on that?"

"You are forbidden by your own feelings."

"I have none."

"Please be serious. You are twenty-two years older than Wilmay—much too old. You are also much too poor; you have about

a quarter of the money that Wilmay has. With her wonderful beauty she ought to make a brilliant marriage. Youth, wealth, high rank—she ought to have all of them, and you know it, and you have none of them. Besides, what would the world say? That you had taken advantage of your position as her guardian to serve your own interests rather than hers. And the world would be right."

"And yet you have told me to marry money."

"No; I did mention a lady—two ladies—who might have made you happy, would certainly have accepted you, and happened to have money. That is a very different thing. Ah, if you could only have taken my advice then!"

"I couldn't have married both, unless I'd arranged for the sentences to run consecutively—that's the right phrase, I believe—and I didn't care to make invidious distinctions. And now, my dear Bertha, you can curb your feverish imagination. I am not

going to marry Wilmay. I am going to Paris to-night, which, as you will see in your calmer moments, is not the same thing."

"Can you take nothing seriously? Of course, I did not seriously suppose that you wanted to marry Wilmay, but her future's a very grave question, and I don't see why I should be laughed at because I am so anxious to do the best I possibly can for her."

"Well then, I *will* speak seriously. You have your own idea of a brilliant marriage, and I do not think your idea is Wilmay's, and I'm absolutely certain that it's not mine. Remind yourself that there are such things as unhappy duchesses."

"My dear Edward, I'm not a snob. I only say that one can't give up common sense altogether."

"At any rate, I am not going to have Wilmay forced into any marriage. She must be left free. For goodness' sake don't make plots and schemes for her."

"You're really rather crude, Edward. One does not force people nowadays. I might,

perhaps, advise, if I felt quite sure I was right. There could be no harm in that."

"True, you've advised me to marry your own selections, and there's been no harm in it. Because, you see, I have not married them. But with Wilmay it is different. She knows nothing of men or of marriage; she is as innocent as a baby, and she is devoted to you. She might let herself be persuaded—in fact, I should think your advice would be much more dangerous than if you point-blank commanded her to marry the nearest duke. However, when the time comes I shall have something to say, you will remember. And in the mean time I'm not here to quarrel with you, but to say good-bye."

"I never quarrel," said Bertha, with her most charming smile. "Good-bye, Edward. Come to London occasionally, you know. You ought to do that, just to see that I'm not standing over Wilmay with a horse-whip and making her marry the wrong people. I will say good-bye to her for you, and explain, when she comes back."

CHAPTER IX.

For nearly two years after this I never saw Wilmay. Of course I did not spend the whole of this time at Paris. I did occasionally come to London, and it was more by chance than from intention that I did not meet Wilmay there. For some few months I travelled in Italy. During this period I composed an opera, and it was produced, and had a certain measure of success—that is to say, it was not nearly as good as I had meant it to be, but it benefited me financially. It was the first money of importance that I had ever earned, and I endeavoured to feel that it degraded me, but could not manage it. However, I am quite conscious that I am the fool of this story and not the hero, and that it is better to write of other people.

Let me first of all do justice to Bertha. A very great person indeed, who was sixty-five years old, but looked more, was good enough to approve of Wilmay. He even decided to share his greatness with her, and—with the mad impetuosity so common at that age—sent his sister to talk it over with Bertha. Bertha expressed herself as being much complimented, but was afraid that she was unable to give the great person any encouragement. The great person thought it over, and the mature wisdom of his sixty-five years spared him the trouble of being refused by Wilmay. Bertha felt that she had done well, and sighed. Wilmay laughed. Bertha occasionally sent me a selection, and told me that she had found the very man for Wilmay. At first this used to make me rather nervous. But I soon discovered that Wilmay never allowed any of these very men to get as far as a proposal. I grew more easy in my mind; it seemed as if Bertha would be compelled to let Wilmay choose her own husband.

Only twice did Wilmay in person actually

receive a proposal. The first proposal was from a young novelist, a man of good family, but no means. He seems to have been really very much in love with Wilmay. He compelled her to hear him, even though he told her at the time that he knew there was no hope for him. Wilmay refused him definitely and finally, but she did not laugh this time. On the contrary, as she told me in her letter about it, she cried. "He turned white, and fidgeted with his hands, and began sentences which he couldn't finish. And then he was so humble, and didn't seem to think anything about himself, and his eyes were so sad. I couldn't help crying, and I do hope I'll never have anything of that kind happen to me again." Bertha was exceedingly angry with this young man. After his refusal, he went very much to the bad, which without doubt was quite romantic of him, though it would probably have paid him better to have written a novel.

The second proposal was from a young baronet, Sir Vincent Carrone, and this

proposal Wilmay accepted. As I have done justice to Bertha let me also do justice to Sir Vincent. He was a man of twenty-eight, good-looking, and sufficiently wealthy. He was honestly in love with Wilmay, and in most respects he was a fine fellow. He was not clever, but neither was he appallingly stupid. He was a straight man, with a good reputation and a liking for country life and sport. Before the proposal took place I had a letter from Bertha about him. He had said nothing to her, but he was paying very marked attention to Wilmay, and Bertha felt sure that he would ask Wilmay to marry him. I replied that if Wilmay was really fond of the man, and accepted him, nothing could be more satisfactory, but that in the mean time Bertha had better not interfere. How far she did interfere, if at all, I have never learned since nor wished to learn.

Bertha announced to me the engagement in a letter of six rhapsodic pages. She was quite certain that Wilmay would be very happy. Sir Vincent was so good, and so

kind, and—but there was no end to her praise of him. I am quite sure that at this time, as at all other times, Bertha only desired Wilmay's happiness. If she influenced Wilmay at all it was only with the view of securing that happiness. She concluded by saying that Wilmay would also write to me, but that she was very shy in speaking or writing of the engagement.

The letter from Wilmay was much shorter, and I did not quite like it. There was an almost pathetic reiteration that she hoped, or she believed, that she was going to be happy. But there was no statement that she actually was happy then. She, too, praised Vincent, but almost in the same terms that Bertha used, as if she were repeating a lesson. She did not describe, and, of course, I had not expected her to describe, the circumstances of the proposal; but I was surprised that the greater part of the letter was about Bertha, and not about herself or her lover. I was not quite satisfied, and yet I seemed to have no definite ground for interference. I did my best to eliminate any personal feelings of my

own, and look at the thing fairly, and I found nothing to support my objection but some infinitesimal things that Bertha would have laughed at. Indeed, Bertha herself had partly explained the tone of Wilmay's letter.

A week later the engagement was publicly announced; the marriage was to take place six months afterwards. Wilmay had written to me frequently since I had left England, often upbraiding me for stopping away so long, asking me why I did it, and telling me to come back. Now, in three months, I had only two short notes from her. They were written far less freely and familiarly than her old letters, and though there was an assumption of lightheartedness all through them, they did not give me the impression that she was happy. As the six months drew to an end, I heard very little of Wilmay. The trousseau was being purchased, preparations were being made for the marriage, wedding presents were pouring in; Wilmay had no time to write, and Bertha only sent short scrappy notes written in the greatest haste.

It was about three weeks before the wedding that I returned to England to complete some necessary business arrangements.

I arrived in London in the morning. I had not told Bertha what day I should come, but in the afternoon I started out to call on her. It was a bright, sunny afternoon, and I found the walk through the park pleasant after the hour that I had just spent in a dry solicitor's dusty office. As I walked along Bertha's victoria met me. Bertha and Wilmay were both in it, and neither of them saw me, Wilmay was laughing. That laugh consoled me. Everything was all right then, and I had been worrying myself for nothing.

As Bertha and Wilmay were both out, it was obviously of no good to go on to Bertha's house. To sit in her mistaken drawing-room and wait for her would have been merely tiresome. So I went back home, meaning to call on Bertha again later in the afternoon. My flat is on the first floor, and as I walked up the steps to it I passed a handsome middle-aged gentleman, who was peering about him

uncertainly. He caught me up again on the landing, just as I drew my latchkey from my pocket, stared at me hard, and then raised his hat.

"I think," he said, "I must be speaking to Mr. Derrimer—Mr. Edward Derrimer."

"Yes," I said "that is my name."

He was carefully dressed and rather gave me the idea that all his clothes were absolutely new. His hair was dark brown, and beginning to grow grey; he wore a short waxed moustache, and touched the ends of it nervously from time to time. His deep-set blue eyes watched me narrowly. He began to pull a card-case from his pocket, and then said—

"But I think you must know me, Mr. Derrimer."

"It's unpardonable, but my memory——"

"Perhaps I should have said that you must have heard of me. Wilmay would not recall me, but Philip Amory, who was very, very kind to me—though in some respects he sadly misunderstood me—must have mentioned my name."

In a second the scene flashed back on my memory. I saw myself sitting in the library at Sinden, with the table drawn up near to the window, and the lighted lamp on it, reading that letter of Philip's to me. The phrase "adopt a quite different course" came back to me.

I held out my hand. "You are Wilmay's uncle."

He bowed and smiled. "I am. I have been particularly anxious to see you. I thought it best to see you first."

"Won't you come in?" I said. And we passed together into the room I used as my study.

CHAPTER X.

"I AM afraid," said Charles Forland, nervously, "that you must find my presence a little embarrassing."

"Not at all," I lied civilly.

"I should like to assure you that I have no feelings of resentment against you whatever. It is not your fault that my poor brother-in-law gave you a position—the position of Wilmay's guardian—which should have been mine. With all his kindness to me he misunderstood me, and I gather from his solicitors, whom I have just left, that at the last he did not even mention my name in his will."

"I happen to know that he believed you to be dead."

"Yes, I dare say it was my fault." He spoke with more confidence now. His manner

was by no means bad. He was not quite the suave hypocrite that I had expected; indeed, he showed one or two touches of cynicism that rather amused me. "However, I, his brother-in-law, received nothing; you, a stranger, benefited considerably."

"Did the solicitors tell you that?"

"Do solicitors ever tell you anything that you want to know? A man, however, does not make you the guardian of his child and——"

"There is no mystery about it. If you want to know, Philip left me his library and his cellar. I'm sorry it should annoy you."

"But, Mr. Derrimer, it does not annoy me. I have been trying to explain that, though under the circumstances I might feel resentment, I feel none. In fact, it is to you, as Wilmay's guardian, that I come first. I might have gone to Wilmay or Sir Vincent—of course I have read in the papers of the impending marriage—but I went to Philip's solicitors, and, learning from them that you were

Wilmay's guardian, decided to apply to you first."

"What have you been doing all the time that you were away?"

"I cannot tell you all the details. Shortly after I last saw Philip—it was an occasion on which he had very much exasperated me—I left England for America. I had resolved not to permit Philip to advance any more money for the purposes of speculative business of my own, which hitherto had been unremunerative, but still contained great promises. I resolved to adopt a quite different course. I said to myself that I would now make a fortune for myself and for no one else, and leave Philip out of it. As I say, at the time I was exasperated against Philip."

As I have said, the man was not exactly a hypocrite; he was a swindler who began by deceiving himself.

"Did you ever eat a Compactum Dinner?" he asked.

"No. I don't understand."

"It was a novelty in canned goods. A tin

with four compartments—soup in the first, fish in the second, roast meat in the third, and vegetables in the last. A Compactum Dinner, sufficient for one person, could at one time have been purchased in London for a shilling."

"No doubt," I said, "it was very good, but what's it got to do with it?"

"Good? It was bad. I may say that it was damned bad. And I ought to know, for I invented it, manufactured it, exported it, made a fortune over it, went bankrupt over it, and was finally brought so low that I once tried to eat it. And in that sentence I've given you the history of three years. My next bankruptcy was three years later, and very unexpected. My third——"

"Never mind," I said drearily, "going into all the bankruptcies."

"I merely wanted to show you that I did work and struggle, whatever Philip said of my idleness. Philip also said that I should die of drink, and in a moment of irritation expressed the hope that I would do it soon. I must show you that his version of my character

was not the right one. I have my self-respect."

"All right," I said, "I see that you don't drink now, Mr. Forland. But had we not better come to business? Why have you applied to me?"

"Because I thought it possible that you might not wish me to apply to Wilmay or Sir Vincent."

"Shall I speak quite plainly?"

"Certainly."

"I should prefer that you never saw either, and never communicated with either in any way."

"Yes," he said, "you have spoken plainly, and I will speak as plainly. I have no recollection of Wilmay, and I have never seen Sir Vincent Carrone. As far as my affection for them is concerned, it does not matter one straw to me if I never see either, and they are left in ignorance of my existence. It is on a point of principle that I should see them. I feel myself a debtor to them; it is my duty, and I feel it to be my duty, to repay them

every penny of the money that my sister and Philip advanced to me. I have kept a note of the exact sum, six thousand five hundred pounds, and I wish to repay it."

For the moment I was very much surprised, but it was only for a moment.

"I need not say that I have not the money," he went on. "But they can very well afford to advance me the thousand that will enable me to get that and much more. I am her mother's brother, and her father was exceedingly kind to me until an unfortunate misunderstanding. I have a claim."

"Look here," I said, "you have told me you once made a fortune. Why didn't you repay then?"

"I was on the point of doing so. But I was extending my business at the time. Extend a business too far, and it breaks—er—like—elastic. Mine broke."

I walked up and down the room. For Wilmay's sake I had to get this man out of England. I would speak to Sir Vincent about him, because I knew he would take a

common-sense view of the case, and because it seemed unfair not to tell him. But I wanted to keep Forland away from Wilmay, and not to let the relationship become publicly known.

"Where would you go, if you had money?" I asked.

"Coolgardie," he replied, without the least hesitation.

"Well," I said, "I'm glad you came to me. Wilmay has no power at present to give you the money. Sir Vincent wouldn't give you it. I can, and I will. I'm going to write a cheque for two hundred, and I will pay the balance of eight hundred pounds to you in instalments of one hundred every three months. Should you, during that period, at any time return to England, or communicate in any way with Wilmay or Sir Vincent Carrone, the remainder due to you will be stopped."

He said that he was reluctant to take money from me, as he felt that on me personally he had no claim whatever. He hoped that I would regard it as an investment—simply as

an investment. In short, he accepted the arrangement, and pocketed the cheque.

"And now," he said, "you must dine with me."

For the fun of the thing, I did dine with him, and I have never been better entertained. He told stories about himself, and I have no doubt that he lied, but he lied most amusingly. He kept a glass of wine by his side at dinner, but he never touched it, and drank only water.

A few days afterwards I had the pleasure of seeing him off.

"Pardon me," he said at the last moment, "but I know you better now, and I want to ask you something. You have heard Philip speak of me, apparently—you have now had an opportunity of judging for yourself. Do you think I am a damned blackguard?"

I replied that we were all the creatures of circumstances. He sighed, and seemed dissatisfied.

To Sir Vincent I merely said that Wilmay, though she did not know it, had an uncle who was a bad lot.

"So've I," he answered. "Everybody's got a bad egg of a relation somewhere."

"Well," I said, "this particular egg is on its way to Coolgardie at present. Its favourite pastimes are borrowing money and occasionally entering on some weird business and going bankrupt. If it should ever apply to you, I want you to do nothing until you have consulted me."

"Very well, as you like. But, I say, couldn't one do anything for the poor beggar?"

"Very good of you, but it's really not necessary. At present he's provided for. I mentioned it because it was the particular wish of her father that Wilmay should never see this man or know of his existence. She is sensitive—it would humiliate and distress her. I thought a word to you——"

"Of course. Much obliged to you. The world's too bad for Wilmay anyhow, and the less she knows of the badness the better."

CHAPTER XI.

It was about a week before this conversation took place that I saw Wilmay for the first time (with the exception of that momentary glimpse in the Park) since my return to England. It was at Bertha's house in the morning. I had sent word that I was coming, and I found them both in the morning-room. Bertha looked very young and quite pretty, and greeted me with much sisterly effusiveness. Wilmay took my hand, and looked away from me, and said, "Edward, I am so glad—so glad that you have come back."

As we talked I watched Wilmay. The glimpse that I had had of her in the Park had been deceptive. Driving in the fresh wind must have brought the colour to her

cheeks, and I suppose even if one is sad at heart one still laughs passably well in public if one's companion says an amusing thing. Now she was very pale, and when she was not talking or conscious that any one was looking at her, her expression was wistful and her eyes seemed fixed on something far away.

"Wilmay," I said, "are you really quite well?"

"Oh, quite!"

"There is nothing the matter with her," said Bertha; "but she is tired. She has to go about so much, and see so many people. There are Carrones innumerable, all anxious to inspect her."

"If she's quite well," I said, "she doesn't look it. And unless she can manage to look it, she shan't be married at all."

"Please do not let us talk about me any more," said Wilmay. "I want to know all about the opera. We've heard it, of course. Everybody's heard it, and everybody's talking of it. But I want to hear the history of it."

"And I'm sick to death of the opera," I

replied, "and I want to hear the history of your engagement."

But on that point Wilmay was absolutely mute, and let Bertha answer for her.

As the days went on, and I saw more of Wilmay, I grew more uneasy. She admired Sir Vincent, and was fond of him in a way, but it did not strike me that she was in love with him. Sometimes I thought I saw a doubt on his honest, handsome face. Sometimes even Bertha herself would look a little anxious when she spoke of Wilmay.

The time sped—flew, it seemed to me—more swiftly to catastrophe, as a moth to a flame. It was less than a week before the day fixed for the marriage that I got a note from Wilmay in the afternoon:—

"DEAR EDWARD,—We were to have dined with Lady Harston to-night, but Lady Harston has been the angel to have one of her neuralgic attacks (poor dear!) and put every one off. We have a night's peace. Bertha and you and I dine together here, and you play to

us afterwards. You will, won't you? Not even Vincent will be here. We are quite alone, and we both want to see you. Do be good to your loving Bertha and Wilmay."

I went, of course. When I got into the drawing-room I noticed that the piano was no longer used like the back yard of a curiosity-shop, but was allowed to be merely a piano.

"No," said Bertha, "you needn't give me the credit or the discredit of it. That's Wilmay. I suppose when you've written great operas you expect that kind of homage?"

"I have not written great operas, but I have a tiresome and offensive sister: which sounds like Ollendorf, but is only the gospel truth. Wilmay, I am indebted to you. I will talk to you, to the entire exclusion of that elderly female at whose house you board."

"Oh, do stop!" cried Bertha. "You shouldn't say things like that to any one with any imagination. I feel as if I lived in

Bloomsbury, and charged extra for the boots. I feel old, and dishonest, and haggard."

"Do you?" I said. "Well, we realize the truth about ourselves sooner or later."

"Very well," Bertha retorted, "I shall ring and order Mr. Derrimer's carriage."

"Mr. Derrimer came in a cab," I replied, "and he will not go until he has had dinner, anyhow. And, by the way——"

Carter opened the door, I gave my arm to Wilmay, and we passed into the dining-room. We were all three in a state of pleasant but foolish high spirits. Wilmay was particularly audacious; her eyes were very bright, and her colour a little feverish. She told us a beautiful story of how she had really composed that opera, but I had stolen it, and she had never exposed me in order to save me the pain of knowing that I had for my ward a girl whose guardian was a thief. But all through dinner she never made the least allusion to her approaching marriage, and when Bertha spoke of it Wilmay at once changed the subject.

After dinner I went to the piano. The

evening of Wilmay's sixteenth birthday came back to my mind. She was wearing the string of little pearls that I had given her then. At first I looked at her from time to time as I played. She sat half in shadow, her lips a little parted, her eyes fixed. There had always been something of another world about her, and to-night as she sat listening to the music she seemed more than ever ethereal, spiritual. Her marriage turned to an insult, a tragedy, in my mind. I took my eyes from her, and became lost in the music. I was playing the Chopin nocturne that I had played on the night of her birthday.

Suddenly I heard a rustling of dresses. The door opened, and closed again quickly. I stopped playing and looked up. Bertha and Wilmay had gone, and I was alone in the room. An indefinable sense of horror and pain came over me. I was glad when a minute or so later Bertha came back again. She looked troubled.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "What has happened?"

"Did you not see?"

"No."

"Wilmay began to cry, and got up. I went out with her, and I've left her upstairs. She told me to come down again."

"Is she still crying?"

"Yes; she is lying on her bed and sobbing violently. She does not seem able to tell me what's the matter with her. Indeed, she says that nothing's the matter."

"There must be some explanation."

"See is in a nervous, over-wrought state, and music always has a great effect upon her. But I do not understand it myself. I have never seen her lose her self-control like this before. And I thought that at dinner she seemed unusually bright and happy."

"Is any one with her now?"

"Yes; I think Mrs. Blayd is there." Bertha sighed. "Oh, this is horrible!" she exclaimed, petulantly.

There was a long pause. Bertha sat with her head on her hand. I paced the room, and

then stopped. Before I could speak Bertha burst out—

"I know what you're going to say, Edward, I know what you're going to say."

"Very likely," I replied, "but I shall say it. Wilmay's marriage must not take place. She is not in love with Vincent. You must break it off. There is time yet, and you or I must do it.

"I don't know whether it will surprise you, but since your return, only a few days ago, I asked Wilmay if she would like me to break it off. She said most emphatically that she would not hear of it, that she had considered everything when she accepted. She even asked me not to speak of it again. But to-night, just now when I took her upstairs, I did hint at it. She would only say, 'No! no!' and once, 'Why must I make people unhappy?' It's not my fault, is it? I am so fond of Wilmay."

Bertha looked at me with tears in her eyes.

"No," I said, "you need not blame yourself. I am glad you suggested it. Now we can do

nothing—she is no longer a child, and she must make her own choice. But somehow I can't bring myself to think that this marriage is really going to take place."

It never did take place. On the morning before the day, I received a note from Bertha asking me to come round at once. I found Bertha looking white and ill, with a letter in her hands.

"Wilmay has gone," she said at once.

"Gone?"

"Yes; left London. Thank heaven, she has Mrs. Blayd with her! She went early this morning, before I was up, and this note was brought to me."

I took the note and glanced through it.

"In the night, Bertha, I found that I could not do it. I had to go away. I got up and found Mrs. Blayd, and talked to her, and we shall leave London early this morning. I have written to Vincent. And I will write to you again, when I know where we shall be. Will you please let me be quite alone for some time? Oh, dear Bertha, I do love you so much. Do,

do forgive me! As soon as you get the address, write and tell me that you are not angry. I cannot help it. I should go mad if I didn't go away."

I had a long talk with Bertha. It was publicly announced that owing to the illness of Miss Amory her marriage with Sir Vincent Carrone was postponed. Later and more gradually it became known that the marriage would not take place at all.

Vincent behaved finely. He would not allow any one to say a word against Wilmay, and quarrelled lastingly with his own brother on the subject. To me he said, "Edward"—by this time he had got into the habit of calling me by my first name—"it's bad, but it's best for her. She tried to love me, I know that. If I can ever do anything, in some other way, to make her happy, you will let me know. That is really all I want now—it is horrible to think of her as being unhappy, and that I am the cause of it."

He had the luck some five years afterwards to be killed in the hunting-field.

CHAPTER XII.

When Wilmay and Mrs. Blayd left London, they went to Starley, a south-coast village where, I believe, Mrs. Blayd had some relations. Before they had been there very long, what had been merely an excuse became the actual fact. Wilmay was seriously ill. Bertha and I went down to Starley then, and took a specialist with us. He said that in some respects the case puzzled him, but he seemed quite hopeful, and suggested Mentone for the winter. I saw Wilmay only for a few minutes on this occasion, and she spoke very little. It was terrible to see the change that had taken place in her.

Bertha and Wilmay went away together. I remained in London, working hard at my second opera. I heard frequently from

Bertha, and the reports of Wilmay's health grew worse and worse. She was longing to get back to England, and her greatest desire was to live at Sinden again. After a good deal of consultation it was decided to let her have her own way, supposing that I could make the necessary arrangements. At this time Sinden was let on lease, and when the tenant was asked to give up the remainder of his lease he first laughed at me, and then got angry and said that he was insulted. However, Wilmay was wealthy enough to allow me to use a form of argument which does not often fail, and it did not fail in this case. So in the spring Bertha and Wilmay came back to the house where Philip Amory died. Bertha refused to leave Wilmay now—even for the delights of the London season.

About this time I had a letter from Charles Forland. I had heard from him once before, but that was merely to give the name of the bank to which he wished me to pay the money to his credit. This second letter was very different, and a great surprise to me.

It returned me all the money that I advanced to him with five per cent. interest. It also enclosed one thousand pounds, which was to be paid to Wilmay as a first instalment in discharge of the debt which he had incurred to her father.

"It may be," he wrote, "that when I am poor I am a blackguard, but I am quite certain that when I am rich I am a sentimentalist. For of course I am under no legal obligation to pay Wilmay anything. I choose to consider myself in debt to her, but the money advanced to me by her parents was (as I always explained to them, though latterly they always refused to listen) advanced in order that I might invest it for them at my discretion, and not as a loan. The trouble was that in those days I had no discretion. Even afterwards, when I had the superb idea of the Compactum Dinner, I was not discreet, or I should have kept the money that I made. One lives and learns. I am now perfectly discreet. I have written to Wilmay, you will be sorry to hear, to explain

myself to her. It is a pity the marriage was broken off."

I wrote to thank him, returning his five per cent., and explaining that I was not a money-lender. I also said that there was no necessity on earth for him to write to Wilmay, and I was very sorry he had done it.

Wilmay's health had seemed to improve with marvellous rapidity at Sinden. Bertha was very hopeful, and in high spirits. She wrote to me to say that Wilmay had heard from her uncle, and that she took it quietly, asked a few questions about him, and then seemed not to think about it any more. Wilmay wanted me to come down to Sinden, and Bertha pressed me most warmly to come too, I had been thinking over things, and I had decided what I would do.

Firstly, I went down to Sinden. Wilmay looked very delicate and sweet; she was less weak than I had expected, and loved to sit out in the sun in the garden on warm days. I talked to her a little, and then I had a

longer talk with the doctors, and I think they told me more than they had told Bertha. Then, when Wilmay was asleep upstairs, and Bertha and I were alone together, I said to Bertha—

"Do you know that I love Wilmay—that I have been in love with her ever since she grew out of childhood?"

Bertha paused before she answered.

"Once, years ago, I feared it. Then I did not think so any longer."

"I believe," I said, "that I shall tell her now."

"Yes," said Bertha, quietly. "Tell her."

On the next day, when I was sitting in the garden with Wilmay, she spoke of her uncle.

"I know what you did for me," she said. "You wanted to spare me pain and humiliation, and you were going to pay a thousand pounds just for that little thing. I can't speak about it, but I must thank you."

"But, Wilmay, as it happens, I did not pay a penny. Let's forget about that man. It's nothing."

"Edward, why have you always been so good to me? I'm not worth it, and I give you ever so much trouble."

"Do you remember, Wilmay," I said, "that shortly after you came out I went away for years, and did not see you? Do you know why I went?"

"Why?"

"Because I was growing old, because I was not the man who should marry you, and because I loved you."

"Edward! Edward!" she cried breathless.

"Don't mind about it, dear; it can't matter now."

"Matter? It matters all the world. Oh, haven't you seen? I didn't want you to see, but in spite of that——"

"Wilmay, darling, I have always loved you. I love you now."

She sighed, and held out her hands to me. I drew her close to me, and looked down into her eyes.

* * * * *

Wilmay said that she was going to be quite

well again now. That was terrible for me to hear, who had been made almost sure that she would not be long with us. But for a time it went on—that delusion of growing health and strength. And with all their sadness, these were the happiest months of my life, and Wilmay said that they were the happiest of her own—happy, though there was in them the solemnity of love and the solemnity of the approaching end. Once only did she speak of Vincent at this time, and once again shortly before her death, when she said that she wanted to know that he had forgiven her. She did know that before she died.

Of those months I cannot write. They need not words but music.

Before the winter the change came, very suddenly and very rapidly. A sea voyage was spoken of and abandoned. She knew that she was going to die.

"And let me die quietly," she pleaded, "with Edward near me. We have been away from each other so long."

As the end drew near, and she grew weaker and weaker, a change seemed to come over all in the house too, for they all loved her. Customary formalities and restraints gave way, and there were ghastly mixtures of tragedy and farce. I remember that old Carter broke down once, and apologized for it. Bertha tried to answer him kindly, but without losing her dignity, and then she began to cry too. She found herself taking his hand, for the first time in her life.

Wilmay died in her sleep. We had the first snow of the winter that night. It fell heavily, and in the morning all the fields were glistening white as if Wilmay . . .

If you have ever loved, you will imagine, and you will know that I cannot write any more.

THE LOVE STORY OF A PLAIN WOMAN

THE LOVE STORY OF A PLAIN WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

MARGARET FAYRE wrote a book, with the title "Whatsoever Things are Lovely." Challon & Grice said they would publish it. They wrote to the effect that it would be a thin crown octavo, hand-made paper, gilt top, bound in art linen. Miss Fayre replied that it would not be like that; it would be the size of the pocket edition of Keats, which she enclosed, and bound in white paper, with plain black lettering. Challon & Grice reminded Miss Fayre that it was a first book, and that they were taking the entire risk, and that they had found in their experience that—and so on, and so on. Then Miss Fayre's

brougham stopped outside the office, and Miss Fayre limped heavily into Grice's private room. Challon was taking a Saturday-to-Monday. Three minutes later Mr. Grice, rather flustered, was saying, "My dear lady, do put that cheque-book up; we don't do business like that. Whether you read it or whether you did not, we have signed the agreement, and we intend to abide by it. If you did not think that 'risk' meant money risk, what did you think it meant?"

"The risk of publishing a book which the critics did not like."

Mr. Grice smiled. "To that, Miss Fayre, we are accustomed. It does not affect us. But as to the form of the book, you had better really be guided by us. Published in the form you suggest, it would never do. No display—booksellers wouldn't look at it—soiled almost before it was shown! What we say is a thin crown octavo, art linen,—mind you, you can pick your own shade; we don't object to that,—and some sort of allegorical design—say, for instance, water-lilies with—

er—fairies. Believe me, that's the kind of thing we always do for a book of that sort."

"But it's not a book of that sort. I know that sort. My book's all kinds of foolishness that I happen to have thought about some thing. It musn't go peacocking about, as if it pretended to be anything. Oh, do let me tell you!"

She told him, and he listened. Challon & Grice were honest men. Challon had a weakness for bringing out extravagantly precious editions of eighteenth-century memoirs; but Grice had no weakness at all. His mind was one white blaze of commercial electric light.

She spoke with enthusiasm. When she had finished, Grice went twice up and down the edge of his Turkey carpet. Then he said, "Have your own way. I didn't read the book, but Mr. Challon did. However, I've heard you, and—if I may speak candidly—either you're a genius or ——" Here Mr. Grice paused.

"Well?" said Miss Fayre. "Do, please, speak candidly."

"I know when a book's good of its kind," said Grice rather dolefully, "but I don't know what to do when a book isn't of any kind at all. Mr. Challon read the book, and thought highly of it. I'm going to give in. Bring out your book in any form you like. Dictate the advertisements, and say where they are to appear. I leave it all to you."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Grice," said Miss Fayre. "I will. Good afternoon."

And she limped heavily out, and Mr. Grice put her into her brougham. He came back, and once more trod the edge of that Turkey carpet. Then he said, "After all, it's always worth while to take one to a straight flush." And he sat down to the work which he really did understand.

Then the book appeared (32mo, wrapper), and was sent out for review.

To the first reviewer it was one of a batch which were to be done in two lines each. What is to be reviewed in two lines must be read in two minutes. He wrote: "A sympathetic study of some of the

beauties of nature and art from the feminine standpoint," which was not bad in two minutes.

To the second reviewer it was a puzzle. But he had got some phrases, not too much used, in his drawer, and they seemed to fit it fairly well. "Eccentricity rather than originality; . . . by no means without a curious charm of its own; . . . *sui generis;* . . . certainly reveals a delightful personality; . . . none of us infallible, not even the youngest, and the author is obviously quite a young girl; she is in love with all beautiful things; . . . if Miss Fayre could attain to a little more coherence and restraint, she might yet," etc. etc.

The third reviewer was comic. He did not actually review the book, but noticed a child-like note that Margaret Fayre had appended at the end of it. It was a note on bookbinding, with special reference to very small books. It began: "This is a private note. If you have liked my little book, and want to keep it, then you may read this note, but

not otherwise." Of course the comic critic parodied this: "If you like this review, and don't want to keep it, you needn't, but not otherwise."

The fourth reviewer was a clever young man, but with a tendency to be enthusiastic. Miss Fayre's book made him very enthusiastic. He said it was the most beautiful and consolatory work that had been written for many years. He became the apostle of Margaret Fayre. He preached her in paragraphs. He preached with persistence. He preached her by direct exposition. He preached her by indirect allusion. Other apostles joined the movement. It spread; the heather was ablaze. "Whatsoever Things are Lovely" was in its fourteenth edition before Christmas.

Margaret Fayre woke one morning to find herself famous; then she cried herself to sleep again.

Mr. Grice, pacing the edge of the Turkey carpet, said to himself, "Took one to a straight flush—and filled it."

The first reviewer (the two-minute man) had

no time to imagine anything. But the orthodox reviewer, and the comic man, and the enthusiast had all constructed an imaginary Margaret Fayre from reading her book. And they had all imagined the same—quite a young girl, eighteen or nineteen, black hair, long eyelashes, wonder in her eyes, delicate oval face. In such a home might white innocence and scarlet passion dwell together. Then they got it all in three words—the ideal Juliet.

Margaret Fayre was thirty-five years of age, and nearly six feet high. She was lame, and walked with an ebony stick. She had an almost masculine face, coarse-featured, with wide mouth, thick lips, bushy eyebrows, strong square jaws. Her expression was kind and intelligent, and her teeth were good and white, but she had no other good points. Her hair was scanty and pale brown, her forehead knobby, her grey eyes too far apart. But she had always had considerable private means, and now she had fame as well. And her gaunt flat figure wore black cashmere by day

and black silk by night, and never jewels or flowers (for she knew it was hopeless). And almost everybody liked her very much, and laughed at her a little, and no man loved her.

CHAPTER II.

"Look here," said Margaret Fayre, "I want you to tell me what this means, Mr. Dirk."

Samuel Dirk was big, bald, fat, lazy, good-tempered, happily married, and always wore his clothes much too large for him. It was he who wrote that comic review of Miss Fayre's book. He often wrote comic things, but he knew a great deal about the eighteenth century, and that attracted Mr. Challon terribly. It was at Mr. Challon's house that Miss Fayre and Samuel Dirk had met one night at dinner, and almost instantaneously become good friends. A year had passed since then, and now they were still better friends.

"My advice is at your service," said Mr. Dirk, raising himself from his easy-chair and

taking the letter that Miss Fayre handed him. "Oh, this is easy enough," said Dirk. "It's another cheque from Challon & Grice; send a line of acknowledgment to them, endorse the cheque, and post it to your bank. I know business is not your strong point, but I don't see any difficulty there."

"How can I possibly take more money from them? I've done it twice already, and I can't go on. It's too humiliating. You know, before the book came out, they sent me a document to sign."

"They would," said Samuel; "they would."

"And afterwards, when I found out that they were running some money risk, and I brought my cheque-book, Mr. Grice got almost angry, and wouldn't take anything. I like Mr. Grice, but he has not got nice manners. So why should I take money from them?"

"You don't. It's yours—your money. If they kept it back, they'd be dishonest. And they *have* taken money from you—heaps of money. Don't ask me to explain, because it's

quite easy, and you never understand anything that is not very difficult."

"Well, if that really is so——"

"I give you my word of honour."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Money always comes where it's not wanted. But I'll do as you tell me."

"Do it now, or you'll forget about it."

She obeyed her instructions, occasionally murmuring that she wished she had never written a book.

"It was Edith who sent me," said Samuel Dirk, "and all this time I've been forgetting her message." Edith was his very pretty and rather worldly little wife—by this time a great friend of Margaret Fayre's. "She wants you to dine, before *Tristan* to-night. Only ourselves. Do come, or I shan't see you."

"Why not? Though, of course, I'll come —many thanks. Aren't you going to *Tristan?*"

"No, Miss Fayre; I mind the shop, and I mind the shop, and I keep on minding the

shop." He said it without the least trace of bitterness—in broad good humour.

"Nor at my aunt's house afterwards?"

"No; I am really very busy just now. Edith will go, I expect. Little brougham-parasite that she is!"

"Oh! What *do* you mean?"

"She's a creature who lives principally on other people's broughams, and saves cab fares. The least I can do is to stamp these two letters for you and post them. Of course you've got no stamps. You're not the sort of person who would have stamps. Equally, of course, your servants ought to look after you, and don't."

Margaret Fayre laughed. "Why so bad-tempered?" she said.

"Only painfully practical and rather rude."

When he had gone, Margaret sat for a while thinking. Yes, Samuel Dirk was a good kind man; he was rather ugly, and he had married a very pretty woman; he was hopelessly Bohemian, and he had married a dear little snob with social ambitions, and they

were perfectly happy. But if the man had been the woman, and the woman the man, that marriage would never have taken place. She thought about that.

Margaret Fayre knew of no woman who worshipped beauty as she herself worshipped it, no woman with her capacity for love and her longing to be loved, no woman so ugly as she seemed to herself, none so loveless.

"I have the wrong soul," she said, "the soul that should have been given only to a beautiful woman." For twenty years she had been a woman, and she had never yet fallen in love with a man. That may have been fate's consolation, for if that awful thing were to happen she did not quite know what she would do. As it was, it was very much a matter of course to herself that she should be as she was, and it was very much a matter of course to everybody else who knew her. But she did not like first introductions to people who had liked her book; they had not always the wit and manners not to appear surprised. And she could not bear people to envy her her

money, or her position, or her fame. It reminded her too much of the irony of the situation; she was in a dry and thirsty land where no water was—only useless diamonds and horrible bank accounts.

That was why, on the morning when she woke and found herself famous, she cried herself to sleep again.

But she was not thirsty unto death yet—not dying of thirst—for she had not yet fallen in love. So it was very seldom that she cried. And very often she smiled, and said silly things with a charm in them, that people liked and laughed at.

Edith Dirk liked and respected Margaret Fayre for herself and also for her great kindness to Edith Dirk. She owned that she was a brougham-parasite, and it seemed so good of Margaret to have Lady Tenways for her aunt and share her a little. The first time that little Mrs. Dirk had struggled through Lady Tenways' reception-rooms she had not known a soul there: that fact had assured her that she was now in society, and she had gone

away greatly elated. After that, her triumph had been clear. She never forgot a face or a name, and always seemed interested. She was a conversational kleptomaniac, and took any bright epigrams that she found lying about. And she was not without ability of her own, though she was too wise to have any particular accomplishment.

"I don't do anything except be," was a stock sentence with her. She was a dear little snob, the soul of propriety, and loved her husband. They had a small house in Chelsea, where you cannot open a window without the finer perceptions getting in—so full is the place of art and genius.

And there she gave Margaret Fayre an excellent little dinner. Margaret was at her best and foolishest, and they drove off in the brougham to the opera in fine spirits.

Some minutes later, Sir Charles Storre and young Stanley Welborough left their club, where they had been dining, and drove off in Welborough's private hansom—also to the opera.

CHAPTER III.

THE first act was just over. Margaret Fayre had remained at the back of the box, because she did not want to spoil the music by the acting. Now she came forward and stood by Mrs. Dirk, surveying the house. Mrs. Dirk dared not say anything about the music to Miss Fayre, and Miss Fayre (who loved it) did not want to say anything about that or anything else to anybody just for the present. She became gradually conscious that Mrs. Dirk was going through the names of people that she recognised. Her floating mind steadied itself at the words "Sir Charles Storre."

"Poor Sir Charles!" said Margaret.

He was literally poor. He was probably the poorest baronet in the United Kingdom.

He lived in two rooms in one of the old Inns, bought one suit of clothes a year, considered luncheon a luxury and cigars a sin (though he would accept one now and then if it were offered him), and supplemented his wretched income by hard work at still more wretched journalism. Once—it was a golden day—he had sold a musical composition, one of the many that in the neatest manuscript rested hopelessly in his chambers. He was a musical enthusiast, but he was not a musician.

He belonged to rather an expensive club; it had been his father's club, and he had always felt that to leave it would be to cut the cables altogether. His piano was a beautiful instrument, and had probably cost him a year's income. He could still go everywhere—he was popular in society—and he did sometimes go to some places, if the 'buses served and he was not too busy. But there luxury stopped. He lived a hard life (for he had been richer once), and he did not grumble much, and he was pleasingly simple. One grievance he had. Complimentary tickets

for the opera—or for anywhere else—were not sent to the syndicate of (three) small provincial newspapers which he represented. "In the name of heaven, why not?" he would ask furiously. "Don't they know their own business?" He took his journalism very seriously—felt a heavy sense of responsibility about his London Letter.

He was of no particular age. His face was thin and ascetic, with a heavy grey moustache; his figure was tall and soldierly. Simple, poor, sweet-natured people generally have blue eyes; Sir Charles had blue eyes—rather a light blue.

"He will be in heaven to-night," said Mrs. Dirk. "He loves the opera, and he never gets here unless somebody takes him. I wonder whom he's with. It's a remarkably handsome boy, anyhow."

"Yes," said Margaret, "he is very beautiful."

"You say that as if you despised him for it."

"But I don't. I'm inclined to be fond of him for it. Just as I was inclined to

be fond of you at the first, before I knew you, because you were beautiful."

Mrs. Dirk sighed. "Oh dear! often I think I'm not beautiful—only perky and neat."

Margaret Fayre laughed. "You sometimes dress that way, but you're really beautiful."

"I'd far sooner be clever, and very, very, very absurdly rich."

"I'm quite clever and quite rich enough," said Margaret. "I made a lovely little book, and it's in its ten-thousand-millionth edition (hooray!), and a man with no mind called me the English Heine. There's the lot, and you can take it—you can have it all, if you'll give me your beautiful hair. You don't really want to be like me."

"I'm quite sure you don't want to be like me."

"One doesn't want to sit on the moon and drink boiling ices out of a gasometer. That is to say, one doesn't want the impossible. But if I had the management of things, you and I would have exchanged souls, my dear."

Later, Sir Charles craved and obtained permission to introduce a very great admirer of Margaret's book and the son of an old friend of Lady Tenways, Stanley Welborough, just returned from ten years' residence abroad. He was very handsome—in an imperial, clean-shaven, strong-chinned way. He talked almost exclusively to Margaret Fayre the whole time that he was in the box: it turned out that they had met once before, when he was a boy of ten.

"And I was a woman of twenty. I don't remember it. What did I do?"

"I was being sent off to my first private school, and you gave me ten shillings, and I was very doubtful whether I ought to take it."

"And did you take it?"

"I have always taken everything I could get."

Sir Charles and young Welborough were not going on after the opera. But the pair were likely to meet again—Welborough very much hoped so. It had been such a pleasure

to him. Miss Fayre must be tired of hearing the praises of her book, but—well, there was nothing like it—to him, at least, there was nothing like it.

And all the rest of the evening Margaret was very amusing. There was a group of clever men round her most of the time at Lady Tenways' house. Margaret said once that young men regarded her as a sister, and she liked it, but she wished that old men did not regard her as a mother.

Mrs. Dirk magnanimously refused to be taken home in Margaret Fayre's carriage. "No," she said, "it's time that your two nice horses were put in their little beds and tucked up for the night."

So she took a hansom, and Miss Fayre's coachman's blessing.

Samuel was sitting up for her. He had changed his evening coat for a ragged tweed jacket with a large check pattern, and was smoking a black briar with the bowl much broken down round the edges. He helped Edith with her cloak, overpaid the cabman,

locked and bolted the front door, and came back into his writing-room softly whistling a hymn tune. The floor was strewn with sheets of manuscript, and Samuel picked them up, numbered them, and arranged them as he talked.

"You poor dear! You've been working all this time," said Edith from the easy-chair.

Samuel grinned, and held out a handful of manuscript.

"Bread," he said. "Item butter, likewise cab-fares. And all made in our own model factory."

"And is it all very good?"

"No, it's rather dull. But the public won't find it out, and I shan't tell 'em. Had a good evening?"

"Delightful. It's late, and yet I don't feel a bit tired. Sammy, I do like Margaret Fayre immensely."

"I wish you'd get her married to somebody. Sentimentalists with money ought not to be left lying about. She's too good to be victimised. She wants looking after."

"It's not so easy to marry people to people satisfactorily."

"Why not—in her case?"

"She could be married for her money any time; but that's just what you're trying to guard against. I don't know a man who would marry her for herself."

"Why not?"

"She's a dear, but she's not pretty, and she doesn't make the best of herself by a long way. She looks too weird, really."

"Well?"

"Well, suppose there were no me, would you marry her yourself?"

"Bless my soul! I don't know. Probably not. In any case, she'd refuse me; she worships the beautiful, and I'm ordinary and bald."

"But you're a man—that makes all the difference. A nice, comfortable, good-tempered, big, male sort of man like you can always get married. But the big plain woman—ah, it's just as well that Margaret's a genius (I suppose she *is* a genius, though she often

talks like a mad baby), for now she's got something else to think about."

"My dear," said Samuel, "nobody's ever got anything else to think about." And with this grossly inaccurate generalisation he sent Edith upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

STANLEY WELBOROUGH'S father had been the rector of Aldley, Lady Tenways' country-place, but had since retired. His mother was dead.

His father allowed Stanley four hundred a year, and his own way in most things. At the age of fifteen he went abroad with a private tutor. At the age of eighteen he cast off the tutor, and began to look for a profession, and at twenty-five he had returned from wandering, with a thorough knowledge of French, German, and Italian; but he had not found a profession. On arriving in England he stayed for a month with his father, and his father was mildly vexed, for he thought that a young man with Stanley's abilities ought to do something. "It's not

so much the money," he said, "as the occupation. Though, if it comes to that, you might want to marry."

"Yes, I had thought about that."

"Well, you can't marry on four hundred a year, and you'll have no more from me till I die, and you can't reasonably expect me to die until I've finished my history of the county. Besides, you're getting on now—already you're too old for a good many things."

"Quite so, quite so; I had realised that. The difficulty is to put one's hand on anything that's really congenial."

The end of it was that he came up to London. He took chambers in Duke Street, and a hansom for the season, and engaged a servant. That was in the morning. In the afternoon he found Sir Charles in the Park. Sir Charles was surreptitiously taking notes on his shirt-cuff of the colour-scheme and arrangement of the flower-beds for the purposes of his London Letter. Stanley recognised Sir Charles, and introduced himself

afresh, for they had not met since Stanley was a boy. Soon they were recalling old times, asking and answering innumerable questions; they got to be rather pleased with each other.

"What's your club?" Stanley asked.

Sir Charles told him.

"Mine too; I've belonged to it for years, and never once entered it. It would be so kind of you if you'd dine with me there to-night and show me my way about a little. I'm alone in London, and as I've only just arrived I've not called on a soul yet. My father will be so interested to hear of our chance meeting. You have not been down to Aldley for years, he told me, but he often speaks of you."

"Ah, my work!" said Sir Charles. "This journalism—you have to stick at it, you know. His county history?"

"Going on capitally; he will be pleased that you inquired. What do you say? An early dinner, and the opera afterwards. Come, Sir Charles, have pity on my loneliness."

"I should like to come very much," said Sir Charles, simply. "I love the opera,—it's *Tristan* to-night,—but, as you know, I'm a poor man."

"And I'm not a rich one myself. This is a little extravagance fully justified by the occasion."

Sir Charles let himself be persuaded, and enjoyed himself immensely.

Stanley Welborough had fallen into the selfish habit of taking a lot of trouble to please people. The habit might, of course, be unselfish, but it was not so with Stanley. It flattered his vanity that people should have a high opinion of him. That high opinion was the easiest to create with people who would only see him for a very short time. He took advantage of the fact that he was a ship that passed in the night, and indulged in the flashiest of flash signalling. And he knew the value of first impressions. He had seen other cities than London, and in beginning London he wished people to speak well of him. He had done his best to please Sir Charles, and

he also did his best to please Margaret Fayre. He vaguely recalled a flaming review (the enthusiast had been responsible); Sir Charles let fall the title; tact did the rest. It was worth doing, for she went about a good deal, and she was Lady Tenways' niece, and she was apparently something of an aristocratic lioness. Now, the aristocratic lioness is the rarest kind of lioness; it will neither growl nor look the part. But he pencilled her in his diary that night as "a large bony authoress in a box."

Next morning in his hotel in Albemarle Street (a fortnight was needed to furnish and redecorate those Duke Street chambers) he thought over things, then he sent his servant out. "You're to go to the nearest bookseller," he said, "and get me this." He gave the man a scrap of paper. On it he had written: "A book by Miss Margaret Fayre. The title is 'Beautiful Things,' or something of that sort." And the man presented it to the bookseller, but the bookseller knew better. Soon Stanley Welborough was handling a tiny copy of

"Whatsoever Things are Lovely," while the servant went on to execute other commissions.

"It's beastly small print," he murmured to himself. "It's not always easy to understand what she's driving at," he thought a little later. He read the page again, and ejaculated "Good!" He was neither an artist nor a fool. The book had pleased those people best who were a little of both. The book read to him as if it had been written by a phenomenally intelligent child. After the first chapter he saw no reason to change the criticism which he had volunteered before he had begun the book. There really was "nothing like it."

He had no time to read any more. He had to interview two tailors and give some instructions about his chambers before luncheon. In the afternoon he called on Lady Tenways. Margaret Fayre happened to be there.

"I've just been through that delicious first chapter again," he said. "Why did no one ever get just that point of view before?"

She answered him with a monosyllable, and turned to somebody else. He was furious.

He was taking trouble to please this quite plain woman, and she refused to be pleased.

Of course she was quite pleased, and only did not want to think that she was pleased; and she did not want to think it, because it seemed somehow humiliating. But he had a bad conscience about that book, and with a bad conscience and worse perceptions one's judgment becomes unreliable. Stanley considered that he had been most unquestionably snubbed, and he conjectured that he was snubbed, because in some way she had discovered that he had not really read her book. So he talked to Lady Tenways with a rather obvious and over-accentuated cynicism, and turned a profile to Margaret Fayre—a profile wherein she detected an emotional and moving nostril and an indignant upper lip.

When he left he bowed to her formally. She left her group and came towards him, with hand outstretched, saying, "Mr. Welborough."

He took her hand, of course, murmuring his good-bye.

"I'm so sorry about—er—just now," she said. "I didn't mean to be rude. But if I'm suddenly praised—it's too stupid of me—I sometimes get shy. Thank you so much."

Then he saw in a flash that he—he of all men, he with his international experiences! had behaved like a sulky schoolboy. But in another flash he had seen that sunny good temper was the only card in his hand, and at once he played it.

"I own it—I have been angry. You see, I have felt so enthusiastic about that little book, and had hoped that you would talk to me about it. It was really impertinent in me; you would have been justified—of course, praise must bore you now even when it comes from those who have more right——"

"Oh, please, please! I love praise. Give me time to gasp, some time, and I could eat praise all day. No, it wouldn't be good for me. The only smart thing about the donkey is that it eats thistles."

"Who is going to give you thistles?"

"Mr. Dirk does occasionally."

"Mr. Dirk?"

"The husband of that charming lady who was with me the other night."

"Of course—I remember. Good-bye, Miss Fayre."

She said good-bye. The words "thanks," "forgive," "delighted," "too charming," bubbled up out of their incoherent farewells.

The verdict in the diary that day was rather more favourable. "The authoress remains not beautiful—but is beginning to impress me with the idea that she is most other things."

When he had gone, and the rest had gone, Margaret said—

"Aunt Jane, are you going to ask Mr. Welborough to dinner?"

"Certainly—his father's quite an old friend, —I'm asking him for the 17th."

"Me too?"

"Of course, if you like. Why?"

"Because I am thinking about falling in love with him."

"Then, by all means——" Lady Tenways laughed. With her, conversational *finesse* was

reduced to its very simplest form. As long as you said exactly what you meant she never believed you.

Yes, Margaret Fayre was thinking about falling in love. On the night of the 17th she actually did fall in love. So also did Stanley Welborough. But then Margaret fell in love with Stanley, and Stanley fell in love with Catherine ("Kitty"), second daughter of Charles Carton-Wright, R.A.

'Tis not uncommon in love—A loves B, and B loves C. Doubtless, here and there in real life, one might trace out such a progression which would exhaust the alphabet, with the numerals added.

But there was in this case one peculiarity perhaps worth mentioning. Margaret made up her mind, on sentimental grounds, that she must not and would not marry Stanley. And Stanley, on certain financial considerations, made up his mind that he must and would marry Margaret.

CHAPTER V.

THE dinner of the 17th had come and gone, and weeks had passed. The chambers in Duke Street were furnished, and in them sat Stanley Welborough, calculating. On his writing-table lay a copy, exquisitely bound, and read all through by this time, of "Whatsoever Things are Lovely." In a locked drawer of the same table were two foolish letters from Miss Catherine Carton-Wright, a photograph of her in evening dress, and a piece of red ribbon about which there was a history. In an unlocked drawer were bills, which for the time being could wait. These were the materials for the calculation.

Lady Tenways said, "That boy amuses me, but he's been spoiled. He can't really be meaning to marry Margaret. He's playing a

game—don't know what it is, but he's certainly playing a game."

Old Mrs. Holly, who had been engaged by Margaret as a chaperon, and called herself a lady-companion, and was in reality a superior housekeeper, noticed nothing—except that Margaret's moods changed very rapidly.

Sir Charles Storre looked about him in crowded rooms, from time to time, and sighted Margaret Fayre, but rarely could get a word with her. Welborough was everywhere.

"It's nothing to me, of course," Sir Charles said to himself. But he went into the minor, and some touch of pessimism crept into his London Letter. Indeed, he began one paragraph with the phrase, "The railway companies, with their customary imbecility." But it was too strong, and not kind; he deleted it.

Edith Dirk, also, was not unobservant.

"Is Mr. Welborough rich?" she asked her husband.

"He means to be," said Samuel, sardonically.

"He does things *en prince*."

"No—he does them on tick. He hasn't actually the money on him, but he'll be marrying it in the course of a few weeks, and then he'll send a cheque. It's purely a business matter, and I ought to interfere. But she thinks it's pure romance, and doesn't speak, and so I can't. But you might."

"She says nothing to me about it, either. Besides, would it do any good for me to blame him to Margaret?"

"Good heavens—no! Praise him to Kitty Carton-Wright. Throw them together. Haven't you noticed that he's between two?"

"Yes. But—if Margaret cares for him very much—she'll never forgive me."

"She will ultimately. Kitty won't—if she marries him. But Kitty's a born flirt, and can take care of herself."

Kitty Carton-Wright's demands were more than Samuel Dirk (who knew her but slightly) could have told. She was a dove masquerading as a hawk. She never had the courage of her own audacity. She would have done anything to make a scandal about herself—

short of its justification. Defiance of the letter of the conventional law loomed large on her banner, and she waved it. The most intense reverence for the spirit of the same law burned in her heart, but she never knew it until the moment. She consented freely to secret assignations, but nothing ever took place at them which might not (but for the obstruction of traffic) have taken place at Piccadilly Circus at noon before a jury of picked chaperons. A good fool, wishing to be otherwise and failing —the end of the century makes such things.

And Margaret—well might Mrs. Holly have noticed that Margaret Fayre had moods. It had come—she had fallen in love, and she knew it. But it had not come as she had expected—not as a torment, not as a thirst for the unattainable. If she entered a drawing-room where Stanley Welborough was, almost immediately he was by her side. The attitude was respectful, reverential—with Kitty it was all chuckling frivolity. Margaret never expressed the least preference that Stanley did not remember. Did she chance to say that

she loved white violets, then white violets and Mr. Stanley Welborough's card waited at her house on her return. She thanked, but protested. "I have so few pleasures," he replied, with a well-shaped melancholy smile. He was no fool, and he had studied her book thoroughly —thence the key to her temperament dropped into his hands, his clever dishonest hands. And she found it delightful, charming, to talk to one who was all sympathy.

She would have been satisfied and happy if things could always have gone on like this. She asked nothing better, nothing more, of fate. Her mood of darkest depression was when she thought that one day he would tell her that he loved her. That would be very sunlight—dazzling, intolerable—but to be followed by—ah, so long a night! For she knew quite well that she must never marry him; she had never doubted nor hesitated about that. She would be old when he was still young, and she had no beauty to give him. The moment that he told her, all would be over; she would leave London—go away with her memory. Self-

denial was not the word in her mind; she called it love.

In one respect, perhaps, her conduct contradicted her. It was a little thing—ridiculous if it had not been pathetic. She went to Edith Dirk and said—

"My aunt has been telling me that my dresses are all wrong and my hair's not done properly. She's quite right. Now, I can't be beautiful, but I needn't be a slut. Be kind, and take me in hand."

Edith Dirk was now fully in her element. A few sheets of notepaper were soon covered with designs of dresses, rough but sufficient. Miss Fayre's brougham was outside, and Edith Dirk was impetuous. In five minutes they were on their way to Bond Street. There was much confidential talk in the brougham, broken by rather nervous laughter from Margaret. And afterwards a gradual change came over her. She was dressed with that exquisiteness which is only possible to the perfect taste in conjunction with the long purse. Her hair was done differently and

beautifully, and the post of maid to Margaret Fayre ceased to be a sinecure. Her complexion improved, but she would not paint. ("I do sometimes, a very little," Edith Dirk had confessed.) A clever and fashionable doctor stopped day after day at Margaret's house; then her lameness became less noticeable; finally, she gave up her strong stick altogether, and one could hardly see that she was lame at all. "She's not beautiful," said an observer to Sir Charles Storre, "not by a very long way. But, upon my word, of late she has had a kind of fascination—has looked younger." And Sir Charles walked away without replying.

It never occurred to Margaret Fayre that Stanley Welborough would only wish to marry her for her money. She hardly ever thought about money at all; and that was as well, for whenever she did think about money she made gross and unbusinesslike mistakes. Nor did it ever occur to her that Stanley was, according to his lights, in love with Kitty Carton-Wright. Whenever she found Stanley

talking to Kitty, in a very few minutes Stanley deserted Kitty to talk to Margaret. Kitty did not mind in the least—she knew that she was very pretty, and that Margaret could not be her rival.

He seemed to say to her, "I have been with you too long, and ill-natured people will chatter. But I know that nobody could be jealous of Margaret Fayre. To spare you anxiety, I talk to her." Poor Margaret Fayre, for the first time in her life counting victories! She was like a mere beginner who sits down with the real chess-player, and wins and wins, and never notices the inscrutable smile of his great opponent. Yet, for the time being, it worked well enough—Kitty was happy, and Margaret was happy.

But Stanley Welborough was not happy. That was his saving grace, and he needs every extenuating circumstance which can be pleaded in his behalf. Some three years before, he had found himself compelled to send his father a large bundle of bills and rather an abject letter. His father had paid the bills, and forwarded

the receipts with a very brief note which implied in the most delicate way that he did not respect his son. That had pained Stanley. He was conscious of two necessities: that every one with whom he was constantly brought into contact should respect him; and that—as a kind of corollary—the number of those who were constantly brought in contact with him should be as small as possible. It is with the first of these necessities that we have to deal; and Stanley was so fond of his father that he never made an attempt to eliminate him from the list of those with whom he was constantly brought in contact. Consequently, Stanley had made the stern resolve that he would never thereafter allow his father to come into any evidence that Stanley's expenditure was in excess of his allowance. In his present difficulties, marriage was the only solution. No profession was open to him by which he could make much money in a very little time. Besides, no profession was in the least degree congenial to him. He was going to marry Margaret Fayre; and he told himself constantly

that he did not look upon it as any hardship. His admiration for her sweet and gentle disposition was, he felt sure, sincere. If she did not attract by her beauty, neither did she repel by its lack. She had distinction without eccentricity, or with very little eccentricity. He felt sure that she would always love him and praise him. His course would have been smooth and easy enough if Kitty Carton-Wright had not been in the way.

Many times a day he cursed Kitty and cursed himself. There had been moments in her presence when he had been no longer master of himself, had found himself saying what he did not wish to say. His belief that in her baby innocence she did not know the power she had over him served to increase the power. Then her laughter was a constant challenge to him to awaken more serious sentiment. She played the inscrutable to perfection —not from cleverness, but from instinct. For a few hours he would triumph because she loved him, but was always brought back to anger because she was amused at him. When

she looked at him inquiringly under long lashes, with "What-do-you-think-of-me?" in her eyes, ruin was near. The only safety was not to see her; he was certain of that. And he never missed a chance of seeing her.

So things went until one summer night. On that night in New York a man died, who had quarrelled with the father of Sir Charles Storre, and left by will to Sir Charles an annual income of five thousand pounds. And on the same night Lady Tenways gave a dance. Stanley was there, and Margaret and Kitty.

CHAPTER VI.

MARGARET FAYRE crept away from Lady Tenways' dance in the dawn, and told herself that she was quite disillusioned, and tried to ridicule herself. When she closed her eyes, she could see it all again—the deep recess, almost in darkness at the farther end of the balcony—the two figures with their backs towards her—Kitty seated, and Stanley bending over her. It was all wretched vulgar farce, meet for ridicule.

But she could not keep awake to ridicule herself; the poor lady was quite worn out.

At seven in the morning she woke, and went on thinking. The scene had lost nothing of its vividness. She could see it all again; she could recall Stanley's voice: "I cannot help it—I am burned up with love of you!"

Then that little fool Kitty had begun to cry, and Margaret had escaped. She had never wished to watch Stanley or Kitty—had never, in fact, had a moment's suspicion—it had all been the merest chance. And they did not know that she had heard and seen them.

That being so, Margaret recognised the practical value of the ridiculous information she had received. It ensured her against surprises. When Stanley or Kitty came to her with the news of their engagement, she would have her friendliest smile and her keenest interest all ready. She had learned one secret—a bitter secret—one that she had never wished to know. But this would save her from blabbing another secret that still less did she wish to tell.

A consideration of the humorous and practical side of the question occupied her until her maid brought in her tea and the letters. Then Margaret's mind turned to think of the very many, very beautiful, very expensive dresses that she had bought recently. There

were three which she had never worn at all; perhaps Edith Dirk would like to have them, and the maid could have the rest. That was mere instinct, and Margaret's cleverness snubbed it at once. "Why," asked cleverness, "doesn't Margaret Fayre want beautiful dresses any more?" Instinct whispered that it knew, but did not like to tell. "Very well, then," replied cleverness; "if she dressed and acted like a chief mourner, perhaps other people would know as well—people who would not be so particular about telling."

But there seemed to be no reason why Margaret Fayre should not leave London. Some desolate spot was her first desire; further considerations modified this. Brighton was her ultimate choice. She left the devoted Mrs. Holly behind, and took only her maid with her. And the maid packed the wonderful dresses, and was particularly careful not to let Miss Fayre's dressing-bag out of her sight, for there were two thousand pounds' worth of pearls in that bag: Margaret had begun to wear her pearls lately.

It is indecent for a woman to break her heart except for the loss by death of a near relative, and Margaret did not mean to be accused of such indecency. She would give no cause for suspicion. No one could suppose that she would select a big hotel at Brighton wherein to break her heart. Indeed, to the world the selection would deny the breakage. For herself it was not suitable: it was not a romantic solitude; it was not even quiet. It had but one attraction—it was not London. She was some distance away from the deep recess at the farther end of the balcony. She would run but little chance of meeting Stanley or Kitty. And she would have time to think the thing out.

For she was terribly puzzled. Stanley loved Kitty. Why, then, had she not known it before? Why had she never guessed that it was Kitty? Why had she not seen that Stanley's devotion to herself, deeply personal though it had seemed, was in reality but the tribute of an enthusiast to the author of a little book to which he had taken a

fancy? She should have seen it—she was to blame.

Second thoughts corrected this. She had met other enthusiasts, but they had not been like Stanley. He had made love to her. It had been done respectfully, but it had certainly been done. He had said things to her that he had had no right to say if he really loved Kitty. He was to blame. She was on the verge of thinking that he had treated her badly. An expiring effort of pride or generosity altered it. "He has treated Kitty badly," she said.

Her third thoughts made further corrections. But then they came in the evening, when she was tired with travelling, and tired with troubling, and felt ill, and would have cried but for the recollection that Kitty cried. Sick at heart, she saw that it was the fault of no one: it had to be so. She looked out on the sea—on such respectable, civilised, almost Hebraic battalion of waters as they have at Brighton. How charming death would be! But it must not be yet, not for two years, not

until the world would be unable to assign a reason for the suicide—or, better still, would guess wrong. She could wait two years. She could be patient. "But it will be terribly lonely, for no one loves you," said her poor aching heart, crying out to be loved.

In the afternoon, a few days later, a visiting-card went from the hall porter to a page, and from a page to Miss Fayre's maid, and from the maid to Margaret herself. Margaret looked at it intently, but the hand that held it never shook. She read the name, "Mr. Stanley Welborough." Her first thought was that it was queer that he should have used one of his old cards. It bore the Aldley address, and not that of his London chambers.

"Yes," she said. "Show that gentleman up here, and then come and tell me." She went into her bedroom, and looked at herself in the long glass. She was exquisitely dressed. But one hand touched her hair—one does not look in the glass for nothing.

She thought that she had guessed the situation. Stanley meant to carry out the theory

that his affection for her, though strictly brotherly, was deeply sincere, and that he had nothing on his conscience. For that reason he had come down to Brighton to tell her in person of his engagement to Kitty. Thank heaven, she was ready for that now! She would prove that she was ready, for she would have the wedding-present actually in her hands, and the smile on her lips and the serious brightness that best fitted the occasion. Kitty would adore those pearls. She put them carefully in their case, snapped it, and——

The maid tapped at the door. Margaret began to smile: but how her heart beat! Smiling still, with the jewel-case in her hand and the visiting-card that she had forgotten to put down, she came down the corridor.

"Don't think! don't think!" she said to herself. Instinct, in this instance ahead of cleverness, told her that if she was to get through such a meeting brilliantly, she must get through it unconsciously, playing a part, leaving the real Margaret Fayre behind her.

She opened the door of her sitting-room. A

man stood in the window, silhouetted against the light, holding a glossy hat.

But the man was *not* Stanley Welborough.

Being somewhat unprepared for this, she drew a long breath, and dropped a visiting-card and a morocco case containing a valuable pearl necklace.

Sir Charles Storre (for it was he) advancing, picked them up for her and took her hand.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE laughed most happily. "How do you do? I am so glad. But why do you play these practical jokes?"

"I don't understand," said Sir Charles. "What is it?"

"That card—that card—look at it, my dear Sir Charles."

He looked at it, and was all dismay.

"Did I?" he said.

"You did. That was the card which you sent up—Mr. Welborough's card, and thereby almost found me not at home. I'm delighted that I haven't lost a pleasure, as I might have done."

Sir Charles slowly remembered that when young Welborough first came to London he had met Sir Charles in the Park. Sir Charles

had not recognised him; Stanley with an amused smile had produced a card; Sir Charles in the confusion of the moment had put it in his own card-case. And now in the natural sequence that card had turned up.

"It is unpardonable," he said.

"Not quite," said Margaret. "I have an idea that in time I shall be able to forgive it. I am always more amiable when I have had some tea—if you would ring, please. In the mean time, it is quite charming of you to have come to see me. I have one or two friends down here, but no old-established friends like you. I was on the point of defying my doctor and returning to London, to escape from my loneliness. But, ah!—how did you know I was here?"

"I called at your house. Mrs. Holly told me."

"Dear Jane! I wish I could have brought her with me, but she cannot bear transportation. The least little railway journey kills her. I wouldn't let her come. You may say what you like, but I have a noble nature."

"You have," said Sir Charles very gravely, meaning what he said.

Margaret laughed nervously. Tea arrived.

"And what brings you to Brighton?" she asked.

"You do," he said, still with gravity, and not without dignity.

"What! you have news for me?"

"A great deal of news."

"Wait! Let me guess. It is about friends of ours. There is an engagement?"

Sir Charles smiled. "I did not come to Brighton to tell you that, but there is an engagement."

"I am a looker-on, and I have seen the game. Kitty Carton-Wright has made up her mind at last."

"She has—I heard it yesterday."

"And Mr. Welborough?"

"You guess wrongly. It is Lord Gastonfield."

Poor Margaret! Surprise followed on surprise; she was dazed, helpless, silent. Sir Charles Storre went on talking, and it seemed

an endless time before she could bring herself to understand what he was saying. Her eyes fell on the morocco case on the table—it seemed evidence against her, and she was afraid of it, and wished she could hide it. When her senses fully returned, she heard—

"He was a man whom I did not even know—a man who had quarrelled with my father—and by his death I become rich—or, well, rich enough!"

"I am so glad," she said fervently.

"And I too am glad," said Sir Charles, "not for the money, but for a possibility that it brings." He stood up and paced the room, an erect figure. In his expression, determination saved kindliness from becoming weakness. The chains of wretched dependency that poverty had riveted upon him had fallen. He held his head up. He was free.

"I am glad," he said, "because for many years I have loved you—loved you very dearly—loved you alone. And now I may tell you that, and ask you if you will be my wife."

She put one hand over her eyes. "Oh!" she murmured.

"You had not expected?"

"Never, never, never! Never imagined!"

"I love you—I have always loved you. If you could only know!"

"Why? Why?" She let her hands drop, and looked straight at him with mournful eyes. "I am not beautiful."

"Dear, if I could tell why, I should love less. Of beauty I will only say that—you are all that I desire, and I shall always love you. Are there many more beautiful women?"

"Many—very many. Almost all."

"They do not touch me. To me you are beautiful, and I would have nothing different—nothing that would alter you from my Margaret. Ah! at last I speak."

"Why did you wait so long? Have I been loved all this time and not known it? I can hardly think it yet."

"Think it. Believe it. I waited because you were rich and I was poor."

"So slight a thing? You feared the world's opinion."

"No," said Sir Charles quietly. "With some men and some women it would have been well enough. But there was just the risk that you would not have liked your husband to be dependent for—for paltry things—on any one, even on yourself. And you might have found out that too late—perhaps only recognised it vaguely and at times as a flaw in your happiness. You see what I mean. You would not have shared the world's poor opinion of me, but you might have suffered from it."

"I have always known, though, that you were good," she said reflectively. "Has it been a long time?"

"Very long."

"Let me wait a little until I understand. Tell it me all again. I cannot answer yet."

Miss Fayre's maid entered with a card. It was Mr. Stanley Welborough's card. And the real Stanley Welborough was waiting downstairs in the hall, in an entirely new

suit, with a carnation in his buttonhole and a resolution in his heart.

Miss Fayre read the card, and suddenly hated Stanley Welborough. She handed it to Sir Charles.

He smiled, and said nothing. Then Margaret turned to the maid. "Will you please say that I am not at home?"

* * * * *

A month later, Edith Dirk received a long and very happy letter from Margaret Fayre, and showed it to her husband, and he was much pleased. He was so pleased that he said that things did occasionally happen to lead him to believe that the whole world was not absolutely rotten—as, for instance, that Stanley Welborough had been jilted by Kitty and refused by Margaret, and that Margaret was going to marry a good, straight man.

"I wonder if Stanley Welborough will commit suicide," said Edith.

"I don't," said her husband laconically.

Stanley did not commit suicide. He went

into the wine trade and married a widow, and both ventures were fairly successful.

"And I wonder," Edith went on, "if she'll keep her old name for the next book, or write as Lady Storre."

"I don't think there will be a next book," said Samuel thoughtfully.

"That will be a great disappointment to you."

"No, my dear, I think not."

"But you once said that if Margaret did not go on writing it would be a loss to art."

"I must have meant a loss to Challon & Grice."

"You said art, my dear."

"Well, very likely. It does sometimes happen that a loss to art is a gain to nature."

THE HISTORY OF CLARE TOLLISON

THE HISTORY OF CLARE TOLLISON.

CHAPTER I.

CLARE made up her mind that she would go. Her clear, precise mind reviewed the points of the situation at once. She would never have taken advantage of their relationship to have approached the old man in any way, but he had chosen to recognise the relationship, had sought her out, had invited her, and there was no sacrifice of independence. The question of expense, of necessity a first consideration to Clare, settled itself satisfactorily. She would require two new dresses, and she would spend ten pounds on them; the railway fare, third class, would be fifty shillings, and as much more would be

required for gratuities to servants. Against this serious expenditure of fifteen pounds she set off a month's free maintenance, a few possibilities of advantage to herself, and a visit to a man who, from what she had heard, would interest her very much. For the last six months Clare had made three pounds a week, and lived on rather less than half that. Yes, she decided that she was justified in the expenditure.

The invitation came on a large square sheet of hand-made paper, folded and sealed with care; a few adhering grains showed that the writing had been dried with sand. The stamp was impressed, not adhesive. Clare answered it on the note-paper that is called Silurian, licked the flap of the envelope, and licked the stamp. This she did with a kind of savage exultation, remembering that her mother had told her that his Lordship considered this a beastly practice. "That will show him what's coming to him," she said to herself grimly.

She did not mean to be idle during her

stay at Gayes, so she took with her her typewriter. She also took one hundred Turkish cigarettes and a bicycle. Work sometimes made her excitable and nervous. Generally a cigarette would quiet her. When it failed she would take to the bicycle and play physical exhaustion against mental. She had great energy.

Eva Sands called at Clare's little flat while she was packing.

"Where are you going to?"

"I don't think I can tell you, because it would sound so snobbish."

"That's nonsense!"

"My father was a tailor, and he went bankrupt. It wasn't the poor dear's fault. He was cheated, and his health failed. Still, I am the daughter of a bankrupt tailor."

"You've told me that before, and if you tell it me again that will be really snobbish."

"Good—and true. I only said it to counterbalance, but I shouldn't have said it. Tell the truth, but don't shout. Well, then,

I am going to stop at Gayes—Lord Murrage's country place."

"I've heard about him."

"Who hasn't?"

"He's very old, but not decayed."

"He's rather mad, but in a way that interests me. I'm some sort of a relation, and he found me out and asked me to come. Oh, I shall illuminate him! I shall be there for a month if we like each other."

"He's certain to like you, Clare, and it's splendid. Any new dresses?"

"Oh, my dear! one peach-coloured silk for the evening, lovely enough to comfort the dying. You *must* see—of a cheapness perfectly inconceivable. And you remember that old white *ingénue* sort of thing? Well, I've——"

Half an hour of chiffons. Then Eva Sands went to rehearsal, and Clare Tollison finished packing. And then Clare had dinner, and her little maid tidied everything up, and departed to the house of her mother's brother-in-law. "And, of course, if aunt had lived

'e 'd 'ave been my uncle, but aunt being dead you can't press it." Finally, the night-porter came up to take the luggage down, and Clare gave the porter her final instructions, and drove to the station and took the North mail.

She arrived at seven in the morning. She was on the instant, it seemed to her, in a swirl of servants. It was difficult for her to divest herself of long-standing luggage responsibilities; and they were snatched from her. Her head danced. She was on green morocco, and the yellow-painted panels bore armorial wonders. She stamped her foot and said aloud, though in a whisper, "I will *not* be frightened by servants." Poor girl! Her hair was not at its best, there was grit in her eyes, and she had only slept for half an hour. Such was her absence of mind, or her unconscious memory of past four-wheelers, that as the carriage stopped she opened the door. Then she knew she should not have done it. Heavens, what steps! So wide! Nothing to which to hold! Clare Tollison—what an unspeakable name!

There was an old man standing now at the top of the steps. He had thick white hair, shaggy eyebrows, dark blazing eyes, a clean-shaven face, and well-cut riding-breeches. His heels came together with a click, and he bent low over her hand. "My dear lady—my dear Clare—how kind and sweet of you to come! Welcome to your uncle's house."

CHAPTER II.

For the present, Clare was the only visitor at Gayes. A suite of three rooms on the first floor was assigned to her. The housekeeper, Mrs. Bender, informed, tended, and comforted her, and yet appeared to respect her. With Mrs. Bender, Clare talked freely. When your host is a man who will not use gummed envelopes and says blandly, "I do not recognise these Hanoverians," one may be excused for wanting a little preparation. And yet Clare found out from Mrs. Bender but little that was of much assistance. Some shock was saved, perhaps. But Lord Murrage was not to be known indirectly and through a third person. You had to wade through him yourself.

On her arrival, Clare breakfasted alone in

her own sitting-room. Then she rested until luncheon. "I shall give you until luncheon to recover from the fatigue of your journey," Lord Murrage had said. "Then I hope to have the pleasure of some long conversation with you."

In spite of the suavity of his words, Lord Murrage frightened her a little. The multitude of servants frightened her. The many rooms perplexed her. What she had seen so far made her shirk that contest between the new and the old to which she had gladly accepted the invitation. She was as a warrior who, armed with sword and dagger, the weapons to which he is used, finds his foe; but between them runs the broad river, deep and icy cold, and the foe has engines and catapults. She had the London interests known to their latest phase, and could echo the last catchword of the smarter Bohemia, and she felt that it availed nothing. London is but a province to the magnificently provincial. She was clever, too, but she felt that cleverness, especially conversational

cleverness, would be suspected rather than revered.

Rest and a cigarette helped her to regain a little of her self-confidence. She put on a dress so well made that it was an armour to her self-respect. Her hair was exquisitely done by a pleasant maid. As she entered the room, Lord Murrage looked at her with respect and with approval. He smiled; he had a singularly charming smile. At that Clare felt better. He inquired punctiliously after her health. She was sure that she was well? She had quite recovered from her fatiguing journey?

"Yes, I am quite well." Then, playing simplicity boldly, "And only a little frightened."

"I am sorry, believe me, very sorry, that you should be frightened, my dear Clare. Why is it?"

"I come from a little flat in London; this house is so large. And I am rather afraid of you, too."

"Pray consider me as your uncle—for we

are indeed kin—and your very humble servant." He raised her hand to his lips. "And do not be afraid of me." Clare spoke quickly; Lord Murrage spoke slowly, even to the verge of pomposity.

Luncheon was a very simple affair, served in quite a little panelled room.

During most of the time there was no servant in the room, and Lord Murrage seemed inclined to talk intimately. He told with feeling how he had lost his beloved wife, and some time afterwards his two sons—fine fellows, both of whom died for their country. "I have had some friends, of course, but none of my own family until I found you. Though in reality but distinctly related, you are my nearest kin."

"Am I? In what way?"

"My father's youngest sister went off with a fiddler, married him, and nearly broke my father's heart. I am sorry I can give you no better origin, but it is from her you are descended—from her and that fiddling fellow Torrone."

"Torrone? The great composer?"

"He may have called himself that, for all I know. He was a fiddler—mountebank—adventurer."

"You do not care for music, then?"

"On the contrary, I love music. I conceive that every man of a proper sentiment must love music. I always have at Gayes a small band of musicians in my pay; you will hear them to-night at dinner. But, of course, I should not dream of playing upon any instrument myself. Musicians are necessary and so are cooks, and I rank them together. I distinguish between music and musicians. I like good cooking, but I should not therefore kiss the kitchen-maid."

Then Clare took courage. "In London nowadays great musicians take a very high position. Some of them seem to be almost worshipped."

"So I have heard," he said. "Some of the people about here imitate London nowadays in that and other respects. I do not.

suppose it to be a question of taste. But stay, I must not offend with my poor opinions. Possibly you yourself—— "

"I delight in music, but I neither play nor sing."

"Charming, charming! It is as it should be. You can go into Society as yourself—for your delightful company, not for your acquired accomplishments."

During the remainder of luncheon he showed not one eccentricity. He made Clare tell him a good deal about herself. He received the bankrupt tailor without a shudder, and the bold chaperonless journalist without a sigh. Possibly he had known these things before.

After luncheon, Clare, again courageous, said that she should like to "go for a spin on her bike." He heard her—of course he heard her—but he replied: "Of course, my dear Clare, I should be delighted to walk with you in the park. It is a good idea. Some of the views there, they tell me, are beautiful—especially the stretch of

country southward. It is a pity that you have missed seeing the chestnuts at their best."

Presently Clare found herself, without one more word about her bicycle, walking in the park with her host. The sun shone; the air was soft and warm; it was a beautiful afternoon.

As they returned a young man met them and raised his hat. Lord Murrage returned the salute.

"That is a very handsome man," said Clare. "Who is he?"

"I really don't know; but I will ask, if he interests you." He called a gardener who was at work near. "Who is that?" he asked.

"That is Mr. Smith, my Lord."

"Oh yes; what Smith? I mean, does he belong to the house?"

"He is Mr. Whitworth Smith, the leader of your Lordship's musicians."

"Thanks. Of course. I had forgotten."

Later in the afternoon Clare went to her

own sitting-room to smoke a cigarette and write a letter before dressing for dinner. The cigarettes were gone, and neither her maid nor Mrs. Bender could tell her what had become of them.

CHAPTER III.

(Extracts from certain letters from Miss Clare Tollison to Miss Eva Sands.)

"I SHALL illuminate him." Yes, those were the vulgar words I used to you about my dear uncle. I who speak—made in dirty London—too young to know anything—daughter of a bankrupt tailor—living in a poky flat, furnished with a lot of flimsy, twopenny-halfpenny so-called art things, I was going to illuminate Lord Murrage. I have not been at Gayes twenty-four hours, but I have been here long enough to repent those words. He has illuminated me.

He is a handsome old man, old enough to be my grandfather, but he has a fine presence, carries himself well, and looks full of

energy. He has treated me with the utmost kindness and delicacy and respect, and I was going to illuminate him—a man of that age, position, and knowledge!

My notion was that I should shock him with my truthful, anti-snobbish attitude, my independence, my bicycle, my cigarettes. I thought that he would begin to argue, that I should deluge him with common sense, and that I should get the best of it. I do not know whether he was shocked. His manner is so good that he did not show it, at any rate. He never imagined that I could intentionally give offence, and to spare me pain would not let me see that I had given offence at all. I do not say that his views are right and mine wrong. Of course, I am just as much right as I was when I was in London. But I am sure it would be wrong for me to press those views here; it would be discourteous, impertinent. I shall not ride my bicycle while I am here, and I shall not smoke. Such things seemed all right in London; here they seem blasphemous.

Oh, my dear Eva, I know what you'll tell me. You will say that I have given up my independence and my common sense—that I have dropped out of the movement. That is not so really. It is only that for the time I have fallen madly in love with antiquity.

I expect that the stories you have heard about him are quite ill-founded. It was you, was it not, who thought him rather mad? After meeting him, I doubt if one even has a right to consider him eccentric. He chooses to think it dirty to lick envelopes and stamps; well, it *is* dirty. Only we are always in a hurry (which he never is), and so have got used to it. There is something to be said for most of his old-fashioned ideas, and he never carries them out where it would be evidence of vanity or false taste to do so; for instance, his dress is scrupulously modern, just like any other man's clothes. He is reputed to have said that he did not recognise the Hanoverians. I asked him about that, and he was most ready to explain. "I own," he said, "that as a private person and as a student of

history, I hold the same opinions as my grandfather and great-grandfather; but I am a patriot first and a private person afterwards, and for that reason I would never give a moment of my time nor a halfpenny of my money to any attempt to dispute the present succession. Had I lived during the reign of the first two Georges I might have spoken differently." He is by no means a visionary. I find that he is considered here to be a capital landlord—as the born aristocrat almost always is and few others ever are. You remember Mr. Stead on this.

He would not be called intellectual—hideous word!—in our circle. He cares nothing for conversational cleverness; I should say, would never try to gain an end by talking that could be attained by action. He has not the remotest touch of the artistic temperament, and values but little that we should value. But he has higher principle, more conscientiousness, finer feeling, more solidity. But what I notice most is the complete absence of struggle. My dear, it is balm to this Londoner—positive

balm and rest and a fortnight-at-the-seaside—to come across a man who is not trying to do something he cannot do, nor to be anything that he cannot be.

He has his prejudices. He dislikes performers. I am afraid both of us come under that category. He ranks all musicians with cooks, and calls them fiddlers. It is strange, because he has a decent, gentlemanly taste for music, and a correct ear. In fact, he has his own string band always here, and they play all through dinner when he is alone. To-night they played a minuet as we came into the dining-hall, but after that nothing more. We lunched in a friendly way and in a little room, but we dine in great state—we two in a dining-hall that would seat a hundred with the musicians in their gallery above us. The hall is panelled with black oak, gilded in places; there are some fine portraits; the whole was lit with candles. The band is quite good. The leader is a Mr. Whitworth Smith. Do you know anything of him by any chance? He has a wonderfully poetical appearance,

though he is slightly under-sized. But, my dear, how he did stare down at me to-night! It is possible that my uncle's prejudice against musicians dates from his father's time, when there was *mésalliance* with Luigi Torrone, the composer. I am descended from that *mésalliance*, by the way, *viâ* a few other *mésalliances*. Moreover, I am his Lordship's nearest living relation, he tells me. Does that suggest anything to you? I wish it did not to me.

I could spend a long time in describing the house, the gardens, and the park, if I were not too tired. I was travelling all last night. Dear Eva, do write me a nice letter, and tell me all the news.

* * * * *

A letter from you at last! I was glad to get it, Eva, though you do say some rather bitter and unkind things. You write, "If you're not going to use your bike, you might lend it to some one a shade less baronial than yourself." I would lend you my bicycle with pleasure—I hate that word "bike"—but the

plain fact is that I do not know where it is. I saw it put on the luggage-cart at the station on my arrival. Since then I have asked several times, but nobody seems to know anything about it, and I do not like to keep on bothering. However, it must turn up sooner or later, and then I will gladly forward it to you. You tell me next to nothing about yourself. It is silly to say that I seem to care only for antiquities, and you won't bother me with news of a person who really does want to do something and be something. And I must have described my uncle very badly, if you think of him as "the average provincial *plus* some nice furniture, a few affectations, and a rather mean kind of disloyalty." However, you tell me to write again and not to mind chaff. So perhaps I have taken this too seriously.

Well, I can give you my news in a
few words. I am in trouble. It's mostl
own fault. I mentioned, I think,
Whitworth Smith, the musician, w
at me. The musicians do not l

house, but in a cottage in the park. Now, whenever I walked in the park, I found that Mr. Smith always met me, and I began to doubt whether he did not meet me on purpose. So to test this, the other day, when I saw him coming, I dropped, as if by accident, a white rose that I was wearing. That same night at dinner I looked up at the musicians' gallery. He was staring at me as usual, and he was wearing that white rose in his buttonhole. Did you ever hear such impertinence? I was so angry with him for having misunderstood me that I blushed crimson, and he saw it, and must have misunderstood the blush. On the next day I met him in the park again. I at once went up to him and spoke, asking him if he would be good enough to put one of Luigi Torrone's quartets on his programme. He said, most respectfully, that he knew the music to which I referred, and would be delighted to carry out my wishes. That is absolutely all that was said. I was delighted, for if what I feared had happened, he would have certainly taken advantage of

the occasion. That is why I spoke to him—I wanted to make sure. Also, I love Torrone's music, and wanted to hear that quartet again. But though it has gone all right so far, I'm troubled. Perhaps, as my uncle's guest, I should not have spoken to Mr. Smith. And it was a mistake to drop that rose. And I cannot help thinking what Mr. Smith must think of me.

There have been people stopping in the house, but they leave to-morrow—a bishop and his belongings—all dull. There have been a couple of dinners of tremendous formality, where dozens of local magnates bored each other. I am learning to ride a real live horse, and getting on well at it. My uncle is too perfectly charming to me. Do write.

* * * * *

It's all over. I am coming home. I send just this scrap to give you the bare facts.

To-night Lord Murrage and I dined together alone. As we entered the dining-hall, they were playing the Torrone quartet. Before I knew what had happened the music was

stopped in the middle of a phrase and the musicians left the gallery.

"Is anything wrong?" I asked.

Lord Murrage laughed. "Nothing serious. They appear to have forgotten that I do not allow certain things to be played."

"I am fond of Torrone's music myself, and it was I who asked Mr. Smith to play it. The fault is mine."

"The queen can do no wrong. We will dismiss the ministers—they are of no importance—and talk of other things."

"Ah! I cannot leave it like that. It is not their fault, but mine. I did not know. You had told me that your dislike of the musician did not extend to the music."

"But Torrone—have you forgotten?"

"I am descended from him."

He seemed a little taken back. Then he said, "You are quite right, my dear Clare, and I am sorry. To-morrow you shall hear the Torrone quartet." But to-morrow the London express will provide my music.

I had no sooner got into the drawing-room

than a note was brought me from Mr. Whitworth Smith. He wrote that he knew his adoration of me was hopeless, but he adored me and desired to face the world with me. He gravely feared that his valuable appointment as leader of the band here was lost to him in consequence of that adoration. I scribbled in pencil at the foot of the letter, "Mr. Smith's valuable appointment is perfectly safe. Lord Murrage did not understand that Miss Tollison had ordered the music, but this has been explained. The rest of Mr. Smith's letter is a mistake that must not be repeated." I put that in an envelope, sent it to him, and felt glorious. A most unpleasant little man!

I had no sooner sent the letter than Lord Murrage came in. He began: "Clare, I have asked you to call me your uncle. As a matter of fact, you know, I am not your uncle, but a cousin—a distant cousin."

"Yes," I said.

And then, my dear, without one further word of warning he proposed to me. He

praised me—praised everything about me; most bitterly regretted that he had not known me long before.

I refused him, of course. I do not love him, and I am rather afraid of him. But I do like him very much, and I was as kind as I could be. I said that I should leave to-morrow.

He took the refusal beautifully and sadly. "At least," he said, "let me keep, then, the old relationship and its privileges." I thought he would kiss me, but he didn't; he gave me a present—such diamonds!

Reason and prejudice, old and new, art and aristocracy, may be strong enough, but they do not seem to make things happier. There is one laughs equally at all, one thing indomitable. Oh, Eva, I wish I were in love! It seems so beautiful.

By the time you receive this I shall be in London. Come to see me.

THE FORGIVENESS OF THE DEAD

THE FORGIVENESS OF THE DEAD.

CHAPTER I.

THE dinner-table had been laid, not in the great dining-room, but in the little boudoir. The parlour-maid—a tall, pretty girl—had waited on the two women—hostess and guest. The hostess was Lady Cathay, the guest Mrs. Hubert Vane; both had been detained in London after the London Season was over; both were young (thirty-three in the morning and twenty-nine in the evening), and both were beautiful.

"No men!" said Mrs. Vane solemnly, as she helped herself to four white Muscat grapes.

"None—not even to wait on us. I saw to

that. It is our holiday—the feminine equivalent of the bachelor dinner."

"How delightful! I—I don't want to see anything male for some time. When I got your telegram this morning I was overjoyed. I'd thought that I was quite alone in London, and I'm so thankful to Jean Carton for having kept you too."

"Yes, I have to see dear Jean's wedding." Lady Cathay sighed deeply. "It is rather untidy of her to get married in London at the end of August, but I was so fond of her. Poor Jean! I'm sorry that your own reason for waiting is so much more sad."

"*Même chose*—you wait for a wedding, and I for a funeral."

"Bertha, how shocking! And your Uncle Charles is not dead yet!"

"Precisely; that is why I wait. Do let me speak freely, dear Agnes, even if I am shocking. It is not as if there were any third person present, and I don't think I've spoken the truth for three months; it *is* such a luxury. I detest Uncle Charles. I don't

show it to him, because I do not want to hurt any one's feelings, and one must be specially kind to the dying. I send him fruit, which he can't eat, and flowers, which he doesn't want, and sit by his bedside, which bores him; and he will leave his money to Hubert and me, because there is no one else to whom to leave it; but I detest him *quand même.*"

"Yes, yes," said Lady Cathay fervently; "there is no divine or moral compulsion upon us to love our uncles, and I don't pretend to be very fond of some of mine; but to say that marriage and death are the same thing——"

"Well, we are both quite married, you know. Don't you see what I mean?"

"Perhaps, a little—you are so strange! Come and tell me about it, dearest."

Lady Cathay rose, with a rustle of grey silk. She was a tall woman, with a good figure and a handsome face. Bertha Vane was a little Gipsy, with a touch of audacity in her dress. With their arms round each

other's waists, they passed into the drawing-room. It was a chilly evening; the fire had been lit, and the two women sat side by side.

"I don't know if you'll understand," Bertha began. "That's wrong, though—you are very clever, and understand everything that you want to understand. What I meant was, that I didn't know if you would sympathise. We are so different."

The maid entered the room.

"Different? How?" asked Lady Cathay.

"You are going to take your coffee with milk."

"Of course. I always do," said Lady Cathay, with wondering eyes.

"And I have taken mine black, as I always do. There is the whole difference—in one suggestive detail."

"Tell me more," said Lady Cathay gently, as the maid withdrew.

"You are all pearls, and purity, and propriety."

"And prunes and prism," added Lady Cathay, laughing.

"No, no. Prunes-and-prism does not take coffee at all—it keeps her awake. You are pearls and purity—I am sin and sequins."

"You say terrible things of yourself."

"Remember that I have been living in London and have not told the truth for three months. I can only say this to you because you know that I am not wicked. I confess that I think, with most bitter regret, that one day I (who love romance so well) shut the door of romance and locked it upon me, though that day was my wedding-day. I am out of the bright lights, and the sound of the music, and the scent of the flowers. Hubert's good—oh yes, of course he's good; and fond of sport, and reads the newspapers at breakfast; pats my head, kisses my forehead, and goes out humming. And I was adored once! O Agnes! O Agnes! Can't you see why I said that death and marriage are the same thing?"

"I believe I ought to laugh at you," said Lady Cathay; "only"—she put her hand on Bertha's arm—"you are serious, and it

wouldn't be kind. When I said in the other room that I thought I understood you a little, I was thinking of something else—of Jean's wedding to-morrow. I hate, really, to go to a wedding. I know it's silly, and such things must be. But it's a burnt sacrifice of all that's holiest—the victim tricked out in a parcel of finery—the ghastly publicity—the man in a frock-coat, with meaning eyes. Weddings are loathsome—disgusting! They ought to be different. But marriage—afterwards—is beautiful, even though it may be so quiet. It is not like death."

"It is very well for you—you and Edmund get on so well together. And your nature is different."

"You know, Bertha, that you and Hubert also get on very well together."

"We are on friendly terms. Certainly, my music has all gone—I suppose you know that. He has no idea—likes Sullivan's tunes. What was the use of going on when he didn't care? Sport's the only thing. You know why he's away now? Down at Ristoe to

get what grouse-shooting he can before Uncle Charles goes out and knocks it on the head. He leaves me alone, for that. With Edmund it's different. The constituency, I suppose——"

"Yes, that's it. There are so many duties involved."

"He does not leave you for his pleasure, as Hubert leaves me."

"I'm not sure," said Lady Cathay slowly, "that it's not a good thing for husband and wife, even the most devoted, to be separated sometimes. They see their happiness by standing a little way outside it."

"I don't see mine. But, as I said, your nature is different. Nothing is possible any more. I am capable of the grand passion still. I might meet a man who adored me, and I might adore him."

"God forbid!" said Lady Cathay fervently.

"Why? It would be beautiful. The grand passion is always beautiful. No amount of conventions and marriages can

alter that. You know that in your heart you love Lancelot and despise King Arthur."

"Certainly; I despise the man who loses a woman—and the woman who lets him lose her still more. Besides, *autres temps, autres mœurs.* Nowadays it's not Malory—it's the newspaper report. The post-matrimonial grand passion cannot be beautiful any longer. It involves everything that's sordid, ugly, painful, revolting."

"I think," Mrs. Vane began—but at that moment the maid entered with a note for her.

"From my housekeeper," said Mrs. Vane, examining the handwriting. "May I?"

"Of course. I am afraid it will be news of your uncle."

"I expect so. One cannot go on dying for ever." She tore the envelope open, and read, "'A messenger has arrived'—Oh yes, from Uncle Charles's—No! no!—'arrived from Ristoe.'"

She stood up, held the note near to the candles on the mantelpiece, and went on

reading in silence. Something in her face made Lady Cathay nervous, and she also rose. Mrs. Vane turned to her and said, almost in a whisper—

"It is from Ristoe. There has been an accident."

"Oh!"

"Hubert is dead. He died this afternoon. He was lying dead when I was talking like that."

She sat down again on the sofa, looked into the fire, and suddenly turned away, buried her face in the cushions, and began to laugh and sob hysterically.

CHAPTER II.

An inquest was held upon Hubert Vane, and a verdict of accidental death was returned, and his body, following the instructions in his will, was buried with state. Mrs. Vane shut up her house in Hill Street and went away. She spent a month in Sienna and two in Florence. Later in the winter she found that Wiesbaden bored her, and that she had not enough sentiment for Weimar. Returning in the early spring, she wrote to Lady Cathay from Bordighiera—an amusing letter. For the summer she proposed for herself Pontresina, tried it, and abandoned it (together with her mourning apparel). Then the clear air of the Austrian Tyrol sufficed her until, in the winter, she left Salzburg for Paris.

In the mean time, Bertha Vane was not

entirely forgotten in England. Lady Cathay thought often of her. Still more often a man thought about her, a man who had met her only once in his life, a month before her husband's death, when he had taken her in to dinner at Lady Cathay's house. His name was Gilbert Sherley, and Mrs. Vane never thought about him for a moment, and had ceased to be conscious of his existence.

Lady Cathay had in many letters pressed her friend to come back to England, but it was not till the end of November that Bertha gave way. She was seized with a sudden longing for everything English. She had bought extravagant and exquisite clothing until she was tired of buying, and it was plain to her that she needed nothing more of Paris. But she pined to hear language spoken without gesture, to see and smell a typical London fog, to watch a London 'bus-driver getting his horses through the traffic at the Circus, and even to pick up again some threads of old acquaintanceship, and weave them back into her life. For, after all, one

goes on living, and the worst shock wears itself out. Hatred, love, disgust, all pass, and the chief thing that she had won from her wandering in many dry places was that her attention had been distracted, while the shock had slowly lost force—the shock that she had received on a chill morning early in September, when, sitting before the fire, she had opened and read two letters addressed to a dead man.

So Agnes and Bertha met again. They kissed, and stared hard at each other, and broke into a torrent of light question and answer that touched nothing serious. Bertha was to dine on the following day, that was understood. She would meet Mr. Gilbert Sherley again? She remembered him? Very vaguely.

"My dear!" exclaimed Lady Cathay, "you can't think how much he remembers you. And please don't quarrel, because you are both to come to Rosend for the Christmas week."

"What is he like? Tell me about him."

"Thirty-six; handsome, and fairly modest for a man—all men brag, you know."

"They do."

"I believe he lost a considerable part of his fortune some years ago—he was rather a rip then, and I saw very little of him. He lives quietly enough now, and is to marry and to go into Parliament. Edmund thinks highly of him—says that we are certain to hear of him one of these days."

"And when am I to marry him?"

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Cathay, and was on the point of declaring that she had never thought of it, when it occurred to her that of late she had thought of it seriously. So she laughed and spoke of other things.

And on the following day, for the second time in her life, Gilbert Sherley took Mrs. Vane in to dinner. She had not recognised him from Lady Cathay's description, but she recalled him as soon as she saw him. Indeed, he was a sufficiently striking figure, well-built, standing six foot three. Lady Cathay had

said nothing of his personal appearance, except that he was handsome—and with that Mrs. Vane disagreed. She found it a strong face, undoubtedly, but ugly—well, yes, an attractive ugliness. As for his modesty, that was charming. He seemed able to talk of any subject except himself; his manner conveyed real respect and reference. The impression which he made upon Bertha was good, and nothing more than that. Subsequently, she realised, with a shade of annoyance, that she had been led to talk of herself and her travels during the whole of dinner-time.

Lady Cathay went to Hill Street the next afternoon, and Bertha gave orders that she was at home to no one else.

"I haven't said half everything to you yet," Bertha exclaimed. "We must have a long talk. First, have I changed?"

"You are as maliciously pretty as ever, and look younger, and I feel that I don't know you so well."

"That last must be altered. It is only because I haven't said half everything yet.

I don't feel that you are changed, or that I know you less well. You are still serene, and beautiful, and good—a rule by which the tempest-tost, like myself, may correct their mistakes. Tell me, what would you think of me if I were to marry again?"

"I think," said Lady Cathay, speaking slowly and with decision, "that you would be right. You cannot live alone all your days, and you must not spoil the whole of your life for a vain regret. Hubert himself would never have wished——"

"Hubert? I was not thinking of him. Often, for months, I never think of him at all."

"Bertha!" exclaimed Lady Cathay. This was too callous.

"I think I must tell you. I haven't told anybody else. You know the remorseless way that the postman for days and days goes on bringing letters for a man who is dead? That happened when Hubert died. I opened them. Two of them were from a woman. You —you understand? I needn't——?"

"Oh, poor Bertha! Yes, you needn't go on. I understand—I had never guessed that. How shall I tell you how sorry I am?"

"Don't pity me, or I shall begin to cry. I don't want to cry any more—I've had enough tears for all my life. Do you know that I went to see that woman? It was awful!—she seemed to think that she had been badly treated, and kept hinting that she wanted money. I've sent her out of the country—she would do anything I told her as long as she was paid for it. But as for Hubert, I've shut out that part of my life now. I don't think about it more than I can help."

"Yes, yes. Don't think about it."

"Do you remember that night when I got the news of Hubert's death? I talked stupidly to you about marriage. I was mad and restless. I suspected nothing, but I knew that I was not loved, and I must be loved. All marriage is not like that?"

"No, dear. You must forget all this. There is great happiness possible for you still—you must find it."

"Perhaps, one day. Not yet. I am not ready yet."

Later in the afternoon Lady Cathay referred to Gilbert Sherley. "It's a confession," she said, "but to tell the truth, I had thought—well, his admiration of you is so frankly sincere, so unconcealed."

Mrs. Vane shook her head. "I don't think I should ever marry him," she said,

In the course of the next fortnight she met him frequently, and felt less certain of herself —it was pleasant, at any rate, to be adored, not to feel that love had left one entirely.

At Rosend Lady Cathay watched, and was well pleased. All was going well. Gilbert Sherley gained day by day. On Dec. 23 a telegram summoned him to London on business; he was to return on the following day, and he left behind him a note for Mrs. Hubert Vane.

CHAPTER III.

AGNES came to Bertha's room that night, and heard the news.

"And what will you say?" she asked, in breathless excitement.

"I don't know. It has happened too quickly. I'm frightened, I think. Sometimes I feel as if I hated him—sometimes as if I were glad. If he would wait——"

"I am sure he would do anything you asked him. There is plenty of time."

"Then—if he would wait until it wasn't all so strange to me—yes, I think, yes."

* * * * *

Bertha came down to breakfast very late next morning. She looked utterly worn-out —pale, with dark lines under her eyes. She smiled and answered questions mechanically. Lady Cathay watched her anxiously.

It was a fine morning, and the rest of the party at Rosend spent it out-of-doors. Bertha excused herself on the plea of a headache, and Lady Cathay said that she should stop with her. As soon as they were alone, Agnes began at once—

"Bertha, quick! what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, I'm not ill. I'm not even unhappy—not any more now—except because you will think that I've behaved badly. I can't marry him. I shall never marry again. I know it for certain. Dear, I want to go away before he comes back. May I? I don't want to see him again."

"But why? What has happened? What can have happened?"

"I will tell you. I thought last night about it, and I began—I began to compare —this with the first time. It was horrible. Then, when I went to sleep at last, I dreamed that I was being married to him. Everything was happy in the dream at first, and very vivid—why, I could sketch for you every

detail of the dress that I wore, and of the dress that you wore. You were there, sitting in the front on the north side of the aisle. There was a crowd of people and music. There were flowers too—flowers everywhere. Then the usual scene in the vestry, signing names. After that everything was vague until the moment when he and I stepped into the carriage and drove away. Then——" She paused and shut her eyes, and her face was contracted with horror. Lady Cathay crossed over and sat down beside her on the sofa, and took her hand.

Bertha's eyes opened again, wide now and staring, and she went on—

"He held his hat in one hand. It was a new, shining hat, with a little mark on one side where the fluff had been rubbed the wrong way. I was looking at it, and wondering how it had been done, when I felt his other hand on my waist. My heart began to beat so that I could hardly breathe as he drew me towards him. He bent over me to kiss me, and, looking up, I saw the colour of the hair change,

and the face change. Agnes, hold my hands tightly. It was not his face any more. It was Hubert looking down at me as—as he did at that time."

"It was only a dream," said Lady Cathay, moved somewhat from her customary serenity. "You must not let such things affect you. At present you are frightened——"

"No, not now. I was frightened then—the horror woke me—but I am not frightened any more. Only it has brought back the Hubert that loved me, very clearly. My heart, and my mind, and my eyes are full of him. The rest—what happened afterwards—has become vague and unreal to me, already half forgotten and quite forgiven. You cannot think how dear and tender to me Hubert was when we went away together. I remember it all—the railway-carriage running smoothly, green fields gliding past, Hubert looking at me—myself in a happy dream."

There were tears in Lady Cathay's eyes; Bertha smiled happily as she spoke.

"Does it seem a despicable thing to you for

me, a woman, to forgive that—to forgive it and go on living?"

"Not now."

"No, it can't be. He is dead, and one must forgive the dead. They can't hurt one any more—it sounds funny said like that. But it's sad to think that they can't love one any more. . . . I don't want to think of sad things. I love Hubert."

* * * * *

Lady Cathay was singularly dull at luncheon that day for so accomplished a host. Mrs. Vane had been telegraphed for—had to hurry back to London. She had asked Lady Cathay to say good-bye for her. When Sherley arrived, he had a long talk with Lady Cathay alone. He took his part very well in the Christmas festivities which followed. Being a modest man, he did not feel himself justified in spoiling the pleasure of others by his private trouble. He worried more about Bertha than himself—thought it bad for her to be alone.

But she was not, it seemed to herself, altogether alone this Christmas. In her thoughts Hubert had come back again.

A COMPLETE RECOVERY

A COMPLETE RECOVERY.

It had been a clear summer day. In the pale evening sky was now that one star. Through flat fields a straight white road led from Saffinwell to the station. The omnibus of the Saffinwell Arms met all trains—all the poor slow six—every day. It was now making its last journey to the station for the day, to meet the evening down-train. The horses seemed to move with mechanical doggedness; they had been doing the same thing at the same times for so long. As mechanically, at a certain point in the road, the driver touched his hat. He almost always passed that lady just there. It had been a novelty to him once, and then a joke, and now it was what the thing that always happens always becomes in the end—nothing at all. But

he still touched his hat every evening as he passed her, and with reason: when Miss Emmeline Folker was so ill that her sister and her doctor were ready, if necessary, to use physical force to prevent her from walking to the station to meet the evening train, she would take a cab from the Saffinwell Arms. "Coachman," she would say, "when you get to the station, draw up in such a position that I can see every one who comes out from the 7.15 train. When the last has gone by, unless I have occasion to give an order to to the contrary, drive home at once." But it was seldom that she was so ill as to consent to the hire of a cab. "Our circumstances," she would say to her sister Alice, "are comfortable enough, but they do not justify extravagance." She refused to make any concessions to mere weather. Walking or driving —and almost always walking—she had met the last down-train at the Saffinwell Station every night for the last twelve years. "Poor mad lady!" they sometimes said in the village. She was forty-three years old, looked

sixty-three, and dressed like twenty-three. She never seemed sanguine when she went to the station, or disappointed when she came back. She smiled pleasantly if she met any one she knew; the worst weather could not damp her spirits. If she had time to chat for a minute with a friend without being late for her train, she always appeared bright, cheerful, rational. In the village all knew the story.

When Miss Emmeline Folker was thirty-one years old, and it had seemed likely that the proud beauty (as she was then—Alice had always been plain) would never become engaged, she met a certain Wilfrid Gunton and falsified expectations. Gunton was a homely man, engaged in business, not romantic, not good-looking, not particularly well off. There seemed to be no reason why Emmeline should accept him, seeing that she had refused many men more attractive and more eligible. But she did accept him, and for the first time in her life was in love. His least wish, however commonplace, had but to be spoken to become a sacred law to her. It was the

everyday miracle. Shortly after her engagement he wrote that he was coming to see her. He was coming from London by the last down-train. She was to meet it, and they would walk back together to her mother's house.

She never would believe the accounts of the accident that happened to the train. She never would believe that he was dead. They showed it her in the newspapers; his mother and sisters wrote to her. She was perfectly cheerful when she read those letters, but a little embarrassed. "She is a dear lady," she said, speaking of her lover's mother, "and as fond of a joke as Wilfrid is himself, but she really ought not to do this. Suppose I were one of those nervous and hysterical women, what harm it might do! I don't know what Wilfred will say to her. It really isn't in very good taste—with that deep mourning edge on the envelope too. However, I must write her a chaffing letter back. She sat down at once and wrote it; it was mercifully intercepted before it reached the bereaved

mother. At the mention of mourning she lost her temper. "If," she said to her sister, "either you or mamma suggest that I should wear mourning, or wear it yourselves, or try in any way to keep up this stupid and hideous farce, I will never forgive you. I'm going now," she said, "to meet the last down-train. Don't drive me to complain to Wilfred about this silliness—it's worse than that—it's madness!"

Every night—every night for twelve years—she met that particular train. Medical advice was taken. It was suggested that they should leave the place; and Emmeline Folker would not hear of it—threatened to take her life if they insisted upon it. She was perfectly rational in every other respect, and it was considered best to let her have her way—to humour her. When her own mother died, she shared a sincere and natural grief, and consented to wear mourning. "But," she said, "it must be for as short a time as is decent. Wilfrid has such a dislike for dark colours. Mamma would have understood."

She kept close watch on any alterations that the railway company made in the time of the arrival of the last down-train, and the dinner-time for herself and her sister was arranged to suit it. As soon as she got back from the station, she dressed for dinner (Alice never did when they were alone, but Wilfrid had said that he always preferred to dress), and at dinner a place had always been laid for him—"in case," she said. Sometimes she would say, "Poor Wilfrid's detained again. How I detest business!" or more often, "It must have been to-morrow night he meant, then." More often still she would make no allusion whatever to the subject. As a tragedy grows old, sympathy grows less. There was a time when the village boys shouted after Miss Emmeline Folker in the street. She was distressed by it, but could not understand it. Long before twelve years had passed she had established her right; she was a familiar figure; people expected to find her every evening on the road to Saffinwell. That was the story.

She had changed much in those twelve years. She had lost all her beauty, and become gaunt and grey. She had acquired some old maid's ways—great neatness, and a certain formality in speaking. These were the merciless changes that nature would have of her. For the rest, she did not change. She persisted in wearing bright colours. Her sister remonstrated once. "Ah!" said Miss Emmeline Folker, "wait till Wilfrid comes, and he will tell you which of us knows his taste best." Her sister went into another room then; it did not do to let Emmeline see her crying. Emmeline had a vague idea that Alice was growing old before her time. Of herself she always spoke as quite a young woman. If any objection was raised to her going out in bad weather, she would say, "My dear Alice, you *must* remember that young people can do with perfect safety things that old people cannot."

As she walked along the road to the station this evening the sky became quickly overcast. A quarter of a mile from the station the

torrent fell and drenched her through. The train was late, and she had to wait for some time on the platform—a limp, grotesque figure in her wet light dress.

"You don't think," she said to the porter, "that there can have been any accident, do you?"

"No, miss," he said, with a grin, as he turned away.

He could have respected the pathos of it twelve years before; but the tragedy of twelve years ago is the comedy of to-day.

"He doesn't understand the reason for my nervousness," she thought to herself, smiling charitably.

When she got back her sister met her with some consternation.

"You must have got wet through, Emmie! You'll catch cold!"

"Oh no, dear! I shall change everything. Wilfrid's detained again. How annoyed the poor darling must feel at these disappointments!" It was rarely that she said so much on the subject.

Her sister's prophecy came true. On the following day Emmeline had a cold and was feverish. The sister nursed her assiduously, and she completely recovered.

* * * * *

Yes; that was where her story began to be sad—she completely recovered. The doctor had hinted to Alice that something of the kind might take place, and it did. One disease killed the other. When Emmeline recovered from her fever she also recovered from her kind, merciful delusion.

Alice had noticed that for two days her sister had never spoken of her lover, and had shown no inquietude at being unable to get to the station. Then one afternoon Emmeline said—

"Alice darling, they needn't lay three places at dinner to-night. There's only we two now."

"Yes, dear," said Alice, with no voice to say more.

"There was something in a newspaper," Emmeline went on. "They showed me it a

long time ago, and I half remember it. H you got it still ? "

Alice fetched it for her, a newspaper-cutt yellow with age. Emmeline took it in hand, and then put it down. " After all," said, " I remember so much that I coulc bear any more."

" I've grown old," she went on after a pa " and I'm not pretty any more, I couldn't h that, could I ? But I must not wear th dresses. They are not suitable. Wilfrid lil bright colours just as he liked bright peo But he would understand—he was alw reasonable. I must send a note to the dr maker to-night."

* * * * *

On the next morning the doctor came see Emmeline.

" I don't think I need come again," he s afterwards to Alice. " Your sister's none worse for her illness—in fact, she's the bet for it. It's a complete recovery."

" There's no further danger ? "

" My dear Miss Folker, with reasonable c

your sister may live to be eighty or ninety. She's quite sound and—— "

At this point the doctor stopped short because Miss Emmeline Folker entered the room. She had overheard the last sentences.

"Doctor," said Emmeline, smiling, "I've caught you and Alice conspiring to give me a more unpleasant medicine than you've achieved yet. And that is far from being necessary—the last was bad enough."

"On the contrary," said the doctor laughing, "we were conspiring not to give you any more medicine at all."

The poor joke was worried out a little further, and the doctor left.

"Ah?" said Alice, "I'm so thankful. And you're cheering quite—quite! How the doctor did laugh!"

* * * * *

"No, dear," said Emmeline gently, "I don't think I'll go to church to-night."

"Not on Sunday night? But you always —well, dear, why?"

"It's when they sing that 'Lettest now

thy servant depart in peace' that I can't h
crying. I don't want to cry about it. Wilf
you remember, so much disliked anything
the kind; it's not seemly. Alice dear, I w
do it any more; only speaking of it has m
me think of it, and—and—don't look at
just now, darling."

THE END.

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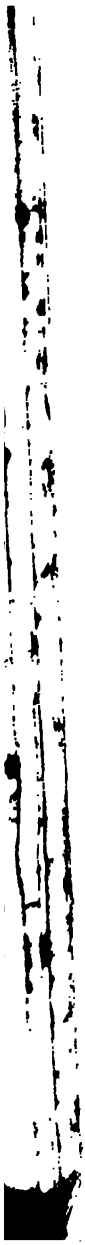

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